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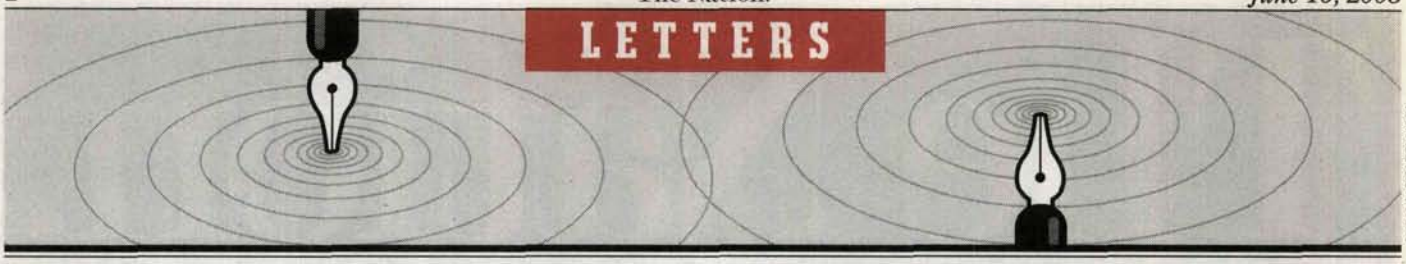

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

BARDS OF BAGHDAD

New York City

■ Sinan Antoon did more to enlighten us about what was lost in Baghdad than many other writings, simply because he went into the heart of the matter—what it was like to live in Baghdad before the 1991 war, and the one of 2003 ["Dead Poets Society," May 26]. The voice of the poet speaks Life, and that is what moves us.

It was particularly relevant to our evening of mourning and protest for the destruction of the cultural heritage of Iraq, at the Poetry Showcase, an exhibition of the 1,750 poetry titles published in the United States in 2002. Esther Allen, chair of the Pen American Center translation committee, remarked that only 108 of them were translations, a reflection of the American lack of interest in other cultures. Marc Van de Mieroop, of Columbia University, spoke of the erasure of Iraq's 10,000-year-old history, and Elias Khoury, a Lebanese novelist teaching at NYU, presented a history of Iraqi poetry and read a selection that included Badr Shakir As-Sayyab, Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati, Nazik Al-Malaika, Buland Al-Haidari, Saadi Youssef, Lamia Abbas Amara, Sargon Boulus, Fadil Al-Azzawi, Sadiq Al-Sayigh, Yusef Al-Sayigh, Hisham Shafiq, Sinan Antoon and Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. Charles Bernstein read from Armand Schwerner's "Tablets," a fictional translation of the Sumerian tablets, Bernard Suleyman Radfar, a poet of Jewish Iranian descent, read his work in Aramaic and played the oud, the Persian instrument Arabs have adopted as the closest to the human voice. A video of the event is available at the library of Poet's House. CECILIA VICUÑA

Fitzwilliam, NH

■ Sinan Antoon's meditation on Baghdad culture was very moving. I assume the translations of the poems he cited were his own, or he would have identified the translators. Readers interested in English translations of poems by Muzaffar al-Nawwab and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, translated by various hands, can find them in Modern Poetry in Translation's *Iraqi Poetry Today*, edited by Saadi Simawe. J. KATES

THE GOOD ARAB?

Mason, Mich.

■ Thank you for Adam Shatz's "Native Informant" [April 28], on Fouad Ajami—a man actually lauded by some for being a spokesperson for the "good Arabs." Ajami likes to think of himself as a representative of progressive-thinking Arabs, but in reality he represents his own interests. "Whatever Way the Wind Blows" should be the name of his next book. SHERRI MUZHER

Amman, Jordan

■ "Ajami" in Arabic means "foreigner," a non-Arab. Although he was not true to his native land, he was true to his name. He and his ilk are under constant pressure to prove their loyalty to their new masters by denigrating their own people. I am very happy he is no longer one of us. OMAR I. NASHASHIBI

Ewing, NJ

■ I was a student of Fouad Ajami's at Princeton in 1976 and came away from the experience with mixed impressions. Ajami was brilliant at making the complex history and politics of the Middle East accessible, which I, a naïve 19-year-old African-American woman, particularly appreciated. Ajami talked about the war in his homeland with a lucidity and pathos that was deeply affecting. I was equally moved by his elucidation of Edward Said's writings about the Palestinians. However, I was alienated and confused by his comments about America, which seemed to imply little concern for or understanding of the relationship between the dynamics of oppression within the United States and the politics of the Middle East. Also, I can't recall him ever talking about the ambivalent, ambiguous role of American Jews as model minorities and as supporters—and critics—of Israeli policies that helped thwart Palestinian self-determination. My impression persists that Ajami was entranced with American wealth and power in a way that made its elites the focus of his policy analysis. His lack of interest in the connections between liberation movements would leave him with little alternative but to cling to a John Wayne vision of Pax Americana.

KIM PEARSON

Cambridge, Mass.

■ Adam Shatz exaggerates Ajami's importance and succumbs to the unbecoming game of ethnic profiling. His view of Ajami appears to stand on two assumptions: that an individual professor can determine US policy and that a person's ethnicity determines his politics and psychology. The first assumption is simply romantic. The US government employs legions of Middle East "experts" and acts on its understanding (or misunderstanding) of US interests. Many Middle East experts make appearances on TV and may have had lunch with Cheney, Rice and Wolfowitz. It is naïve to imagine that such meetings can explain turns in US policy. Ajami is singled out for an extensive profile because of his Arab origins, which leads to the second assumption.

Shatz describes Ajami's "treacherous" thinking as directly determined by his ethnicity. Such analysis is the intellectual equivalent of ethnic profiling. Shatz suggests an Arab could not think as Ajami does unless he suffers from a psychological pathology, that an Arab intellectual must completely agree with Edward Said or risk being branded a "native informant." Ethnopop psychology is a dangerous game: Using Shatz's model, one could argue that any Jew who disagrees with Ariel Sharon is also a "native informant" and that all Jews should think alike because they are Jews. AVI MATALON

SHATZ REPLIES

New York City

■ I don't know what piece Avi Matalon was reading. It couldn't have been mine. Nowhere do I argue that Ajami has shaped, much less "determined," US foreign policy. What I do argue is that he has played an unusually prominent role in shaping American perceptions of the Middle East, through his prolific writings and ubiquitous television appearances; that he has influenced the thinking of key officials in the Bush Administration (a fact that Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz, among others, readily concede in speeches and interviews) and that his ethnicity has made him highly attractive to the US government in its efforts to promote policies that are deeply unpopular in the region. Nowhere do I charge Ajami with treason, or suggest that his intellectual trajectory was "directly determined by his ethnicity." Rather, I offer a complex and, I believe, deeply sad account of Ajami's long journey from pan-Arabism to neoconservatism. I relate his evolution to a number of causes, both political (a growing sense of alienation from the Arab nationalist camp; bitter conflict between Palestinians and Shiites in southern Lebanon, Ajami's native land) and personal (the anxieties of being an émigré in America; the seductions of acceptance by those in power).

To Arab nationalists Ajami's career may be a clear-cut story of treachery, but that is not the story I tell. Far from suggesting that "an Arab intellectual must completely agree with Edward Said," whatever that means, I honor his contribution to the debate, praising his first book, *The Arab Predicament*, as "one of the most probing and subtle books ever written in English on the region," and faulting the book's Arab nationalist critics for their "ideological rigidity." However, the Ajami of today, unlike Jewish critics of Sharon, is not a dissident but rather a loyal spokesman for US and Israeli bellicosity, an outlook that finds virtually no echo even among the staunchest Arab critics of repressive dictatorships in the region. As for Matalon's last charge, that Jewish dissidents could be considered "native informants" if one

(Continued on Page 52)

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IN THIS ISSUE

2 **LETTERS**

EDITORIALS & COMMENT

3 THE VISION THING

4 THE OIL SPOILS
David Cortright

5 MIRROR OF THE *TIMES*
James W. Carey

6 DEFENDING SHOW TRIALS
David Cole

6 LIBERALIZING THE LAW
Alexander Wohl

7 IN FACT...

COLUMNS

6 DEADLINE POET
We're Safe From Saddam
Calvin Trillin

9 SUBJECT TO DEBATE
White Lies
Katha Pollitt

10 STOP THE PRESSES
Nonagenarians Against Cynicism
Eric Alterman

BOOKS & THE ARTS

11 NAFISI: Reading Lolita in Tehran
SATRAPI: Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood
MOSHIRI: The Bathhouse
Gloria Emerson

14 KENNEDY: Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption
ROMANO: Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America
Michael Lind

18 CAIN: The Postman Always Rings Twice, Double Indemnity, Mildred Pierce and Selected Stories
Michael Tolkin

22 GLASS: The Fabulist
Emily Nussbaum

26 ELIE: The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage
Vince Passaro

30 WEST: Survivors in Mexico
Sarah Kerr

34 KANE: All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s
LESUEUR: Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara: A Memoir
John Palattella

36 MORONE: Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History
MARSDEN: Jonathan Edwards: A Life
Michael Kazin

41 BRIEFLY NOTED

42 BARENBOIM: A Life in Music
BARENBOIM AND SAID: Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society
Russell Platt

46 ABU-JABER: Crescent: A Novel
Charlotte Innes

48 ATHANASSOGLOU-KALLMYER: Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture
Arthur C. Danto

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EDITORIALS

The Vision Thing

The early-bird presidential campaign is under way among Democrats with the usual characteristics. Candidates are sucking up to big-money contributors as though fundraising prowess reflects a talent for governing. The media issue "character" assessments and debate who's ahead in the horse race. But meanwhile, what's surprising and encouraging is that the early leader in this contest seems to be a dark horse known as Substance. Despite the fog and froth, some candidates are enunciating real ideas—big ideas—and compelling their rivals to respond. That breaks with convention in a party known in recent election cycles for its lameness of thought and obsessive risk avoidance. As we suggested recently, this "vision primary"—the contest for ideas and forward-looking vision—may well be the crucial determinant in whether the Democrats have the self-confidence and muscle to oust George W. Bush next year. It's too soon to claim their recovery of voice and imagination, but the early signs are promising.

On our scorecard, a gold star goes to Representative Dick Gephardt for enunciating a large-scale plan for national health-care reform, sweetened with the twist that he would pay for it by repealing Bush's regressive tax cuts for the wealthy. Some liberal advocates have already attacked Gephardt's tax-credit approach as too business-friendly; some opposing candidates criticize the boldness of its price tag, more than $200 billion. If his plan sounds to others like halfway reform, Representative Dennis Kucinich proposes to go all the way, with a national health system. Let's have a lively exchange on these issues, and others. Indeed, let's hear from candidates who put aside their consultant-made slogans and dig into other serious propositions for governing, like an aggressive agenda for economic recovery and reform, and a sane strategy for replacing Bush's crackpot imperialism with true internationalism. There's a long list of challenges. The country wants to hear more.

One reliable indication that big-think substance may be gaining traction is that the corporate Democrats feel the need to attack it. The last thing the Democratic Leadership Council wants is a nominee offering meaningful reform. So its agitprop spokesmen, Al From and Bruce Reed, trot out a warning memo, deriding Gephardt's bold stroke as a dangerous symptom of the old "pander virus"—that is, telling people what they want to hear—and advising other candidates to pay no attention to those "activist elites" pushing for a bolder agenda. The DLC's preferred candidate, Senator Joe Lieberman, certainly embraces that strategy, but can you imagine Karl Rove warning Bush about offering big ideas or telling people what they want to hear?

If Democrats want to be taken seriously, candidates will commit themselves to an open convention on the party's platform—lively debates, regional hearings and floor fights that enrich the party's vision of the future, even if some planks are beyond the reach of immediate fulfillment. Former Senator Fred Harris suggests his party borrow Goldwater's old slogan—"a choice, not an echo"—and create the mechanisms to develop policy differences such as a national policy council and grassroots discussion groups ("Paul Wellstone clubs") to carry the debates forward. Many leading Dems will shrink from the prospect of open, raucous disagreements. We hope the "vision primary" will weed them out.

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The Oil Spoils

Under cover of darkness in the early morning hours of March 18, Qusay Saddam Hussein carted off nearly $1 billion in hard currency from Iraq's central bank. The hasty withdrawal as war was about to begin ranks as the "grandest larceny in bank history," to quote columnist William Safire. Two months later an even larger heist took place, this time in the bold light of public diplomacy.

On May 22 the United Nations Security Council approved a resolution lifting trade sanctions on Iraq. The resolution ended nearly thirteen years of economic strangulation and freed the Iraqi economy from the trade and investment barriers that have caused widespread economic misery and social suffering. But the resolution also placed the ultimate prize—control of Iraqi oil revenues—firmly in the hands of the United States.

The resolution creates a "Development Fund for Iraq" into which all remaining funds in the UN oil-for-food account (estimated at $13 billion) and all future proceeds from Iraqi oil sales (up to $20 billion a year) are to be deposited. The fund, according to the resolution, "shall be used in a transparent manner to meet the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people, for the economic reconstruction and repair of Iraq's infrastructure, for the continued disarmament of Iraq...and for other purposes benefiting the people of Iraq." The "people of Iraq" will have no say in these matters, however: Disbursements from the fund are to be made in "consultation with the Iraqi interim administration," but actual control of the fund will rest solely with the US-led "Authority"—defined as the unified command of the US-British occupation force.

The fund will be located at the Central Bank of Iraq, currently managed by Peter McPherson, a former US Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and executive of Bank of America. It will have an International Advisory and Monitoring Board—including representatives of the UN, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development—which will select accountants to audit the fund but have no power over financial disbursement decisions. The funds are likely to flow primarily to US and British business interests. The Bush Administration has already named Bechtel the main contractor for Iraqi reconstruction, touching off a feeding frenzy of politically connected corporations scrambling to cash in.

There is no time limit on US control of Iraqi oil revenues. The current arrangements will continue until an "internationally recognized, representative government of Iraq [is] properly constituted," a process that could take years. The resolution calls for the Security Council to "review" the implementation of the resolution after twelve months, but an affirmative vote of the Council would be required to change the terms of the resolution, which means that the United States and Britain could veto any challenges to their control. American and British officials will thus have open-ended rights to manage and direct Iraq's oil revenues.

The resolution denies the UN any significant role in deciding Iraq's economic and political affairs. It calls for the appointment of a UN Special Representative for Iraq but gives the position no real authority. The UN envoy will coordinate hu-

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manitarian and reconstruction assistance by "UN agencies and between UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations," while also "promoting" economic reconstruction and "encouraging" efforts to rebuild administrative and police capacity. The Special Representative will work "intensively with the Authority" and "the people of Iraq" to establish "representative governance." (In late May, Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed Sergio Vieira de Mello, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to the post for four months.) But decision-making authority over the creation of a new government, as on other matters, will rest entirely with the occupying powers.

The UN disarmament mission is also being cast aside. Under the terms of previous Security Council resolutions, which the United States authored, the lifting of sanctions against Iraq is contingent upon UN certification that the country is fully disarmed. But the return of UN inspectors might confirm the lack of prohibited weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which would be an acute embarrassment for US and British officials. The draft resolution avoids this problem by leaving the responsibility for uncovering alleged Iraqi weapons solely in US hands.

Through its bold grab for control over Iraqi oil wealth, the United States is confirming the worst suspicions of its critics, who argued that this was a war for oil. The old regime may have walked off with piles of cash, but the new rulers will gain something far more valuable. To the victors of war go the spoils of oil. But there is at least a modest price to be paid for this bonanza: As the United States and Britain gain exclusive authority to shape Iraq's economic and political future, they must also accept the blame if Iraq descends into further lawlessness and chaos.

DAVID CORTRIGHT

David Cortright, president of the Fourth Freedom Forum, is a founder of the Win Without War coalition.

Mirror of the Times

With all the words laundered over the Jayson Blair affair, why is my soul still disquieted? Why do I feel even further from the truth than on the day the journalistic fraud was first revealed? The *New York Times* followed what has become, since Janet Cooke hoodwinked the *Washington Post*, the prescribed script of a ritual of atonement. The paper could simply have fired Blair, disclosed the fraud and issued an apology, treating his conduct for what it is—differing in degree, not in kind, from what is, alas, all too common in the hypercompetitive, Internet- and cable TV–driven atmosphere of big-city journalism. Instead, it ordered an internal investigation and turned the episode into a major news event, publishing a 14,000-word account of the plagiarism and fantastical invention carried out in its pages for three years.

While the *Times* has notoriously opposed many of the attempts at reform of mainstream journalism—ombudsmen, the National News Council, responsiveness to the concerns of readers that is the hallmark of public journalism—it was unusually forthcoming in revealing its own internal operations and conflicts: top management resisting evidence of Blair's fakery, ignoring protests from sources and subjects, and discounting warnings from its own reporters and editors.

"*Times* Reporter Who Resigned Leaves Long Trail of Deception" was less a news story than a trial in which the *Times* served as investigator, prosecutor, defense attorney, judge, jury and executioner. It was a show trial designed to expunge the record and memory of Jayson Blair, although "no articles are being removed" from the archives and "corrections and editors' notes have been appended to the fraudulent documents." In Blair's absence, the *Times* made a public confession on his behalf while seeking absolution from readers for its own sins, implicitly rendering the paper an unindicted co-conspirator. Like most show trials, the story attempted to showcase the central virtues of journalism, to shore up the boundary between fact and fiction, borrowing and stealing, and to restore the bond of trust between the paper and its readers.

The *Times* was too circumspect to label Blair a sociopath, but other publications presented a psychiatric work-up of the perpetrator to show that the problem was not in journalism but in Blair. They also poured fuel on the secondary, and diversionary, issue of diversity and affirmative action, reducing the controversy to virtuous attempts to adhere to misguided social policies.

This ritual of confession, absolution and penance inadvertently hides as much as it discloses. Institutions get the kind of deviant behavior they deserve: A society that reveres property is likely to experience quite a bit of theft; universities that sanctify intellectual achievement are rewarded with breathtaking amounts of cheating; and newspapers that value the original, amazing and speedy are likely to run into a lot of plagiarism and fabrication.

In hiring and promoting Jayson Blair, the paper violated its long-professed policy of farming out young journalists to apprenticeships at small papers, where their errors can be corrected and their character scrubbed with steel wool without inflicting much damage on the community. In that setting, invention is likely to be quickly set to right by direct, face-to-face protests from the offended parties. (One of the reasons Blair's deception went on so long was that few protests were received from the misquoted and the subjects of fabrication.) Flaws in character are quickly revealed and grasped in the intimacy of a small organization; the incompetent and pathological can be weeded out before graduating into the more anonymous atmosphere of the metropole. Instead of following this apprenticeship policy with Blair—though he did spend time at the *Times*-owned *Boston Globe*—the *Times* accelerated him into the ego-driven race to capture a place on the front page. Telling the youngest kid in town to sink or swim clearly taught that the institution values aggressiveness and star quality rather than the mundane virtues of truth and proportion.

Race had nothing to do with those qualities. But Blair had the added problem of compensating for the suspicion that gathers around an African-American prematurely pushed ahead. Such practices do not serve trust, truth or diversity. In fact, rather than promoting minorities, it ends up exploiting them as useful and prestigious labor through which the organization can demonstrate its honor and rectitude.

The gap between ideals professed and practices encouraged is precisely what a sociopath exploits. Such characters are peculiarly

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adept at taking advantage of the weakness and vanity of organizations and individuals, of knowing who needs to be flattered and in what way, and where corners can be safely cut. They recognize the power of a well-kept secret: The culture of journalism professes loyalty to truth, thoroughness, context and sobriety but actually rewards prominence, the unique take, standing out from the crowd and the riveting narrative. Sociopaths believe they are only giving their superiors what is secretly desired and deserved.

The supply of such journalists is likely to increase in the world we are creating. "Flooding the zone" with print reporters or concentrating attention on one story in a 24/7 broadcast cycle means there are more reporters chasing less news and being rewarded for the unique angle and the exclusive source. Editors and reporters are increasingly susceptible to the unsubstantiated, invented and exaggerated. We are beset by too much time and space relative to the amount of information available to fill it. As a result, news is displaced by hyperbole, rumor and innuendo.

These tendencies, ingrained though unacknowledged in the architecture of metropolitan journalism, are the mystery behind the mystery of Jayson Blair. Sociopaths, in all their abnormality, teach us once again about the deepest recesses of the normal.

JAMES W. CAREY

James W. Carey is CBS Professor of International Journalism at Columbia University.

Defending Show Trials

We the People LIBERTIES

At long last, the military appears to be gearing up to try some of the Guantánamo Bay prisoners. In late May it announced the appointment of a chief prosecutor and a chief defense counsel, both military officers who answer to the Pentagon's general counsel, and disclosed that it was reviewing plans for an execution chamber. The trials are not designed to distinguish the guilty from the innocent so much as to obtain guilty verdicts for a select few. To this end, they are designed to be an entirely inside job. The military is prosecutor, defense counsel, judge, appellate reviewer and executioner. In theory, there is one exception—detainees who can find one may be represented by a civilian lawyer of their choosing.

But the only thing more difficult than getting out of Guantánamo may be finding a lawyer willing to participate as civilian defense counsel in a military tribunal. The difficulties start with the fact that the detainees, highly unpopular clients in any event, have no access to the outside world, so they can't exactly call around for lawyers. But that wasn't enough of a deterrent for the military. It requires all civilian attorneys to agree in advance that their conversations with clients can be monitored, thereby obliterating the attorney-client privilege and making it impossible to develop the kind of trust necessary for an effective defense. Civilian lawyers must obtain a security clearance at their own expense. And even then they won't get to see certain classified evidence used against their client, which only military lawyers will be permitted to view.

Absent special permission, civilian lawyers may not do legal or factual research on the case away from the site of the proceedings (presumably Guantánamo), and may not even talk about the case with anyone outside their own defense team. Together, these rules bar any meaningful investigation or trial preparation. And even though the military has delayed bringing anyone to trial for more than a year and a half, the civilian attorney must agree not to request any delays for any reason unrelated to military commission proceedings. Oh, and unless a detainee has his own money hidden away somewhere, the lawyer won't be paid.

It is possible that some lawyers might sign up despite these obstacles, but there's a real question whether under these conditions a lawyer could do anything more than legitimize a fixed game. The rules for civilian counsel suggest that the military would prefer the tribunals to remain a family affair, with every participant ultimately answerable to Donald Rumsfeld and George Bush. That may insure that the show trials run smoothly, but if so, all these trials will ultimately show is that we know how to write rules that guarantee we get our way. The rest of the world is already all too acquainted with that lesson.

DAVID COLE

David Cole (cole@law.georgetown.edu), The Nation*'s legal affairs correspondent, is a professor at Georgetown University Law Center.*

CALVIN TRILLIN

WE'RE SAFE FROM SADDAM

A Joyous Song of Deliverance for Spring

We're safe from Saddam, tra-la, tra-la,
We're safe from Saddam, oh goody!
He can't send a bomb, tra-la, tra-la.
Which he could have done. Or could he?

Liberalizing the Law

With the Bush Administration continuing to fill the federal courts with right-wing judges, liberals have turned with renewed vigor to a strategy that not only allows them to defeat individual nominees but also to raise awareness and activism, particularly among the next generation of lawyers. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg will step into the debate this summer, when she addresses the first-ever national convention of the American Constitution Society, an organization founded, as the group's executive director David Halperin explains, to "encourage students and others to care about and influence a progressive vision of the law."

The coup of getting Ginsburg to speak at their gathering was no small accomplishment, but ACS already has the support of a number of other well-known liberals, including Harvard law professor Laurence Tribe, former New York Governor Mario Cuomo, former solicitor generals Walter Dellinger and Drew Days, and

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COMMENT

former Circuit Court of Appeals Chief Judge, White House counsel and Congressman Abner Mikva. As a result, in little more than a year, the group has more than seventy chapters, designed to provide a nucleus of support and activity for progressives on law school campuses and help them better engage in intellectual battles over legal and public policy. (One group of Georgetown law students affiliated with ACS submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court in support of the University of Michigan's affirmative-action policy in the recently argued case.)

While the group's focus is unabashedly liberal, it's not the first public-interest organization to appreciate that recruitment on campuses can have dramatic consequences in the political arena, including in judicial selection. Indeed, in building its fledgling network of law students, ACS has unapologetically taken a page from the conservative playbook, specifically the ultraconservative group of lawyers and law students known as the Federalist Society.

For twenty years, the Federalists have built a feeder system in the courts and government for young ultraconservatives, along the way helping to move what historically has been a narrow, minority view of the law and legal policy into the vanguard of political and legal debate. Today, the Federalists' fingerprints are all over the Bush Administration's hard-right agenda, and some of its loudest cheerleaders are prominent Bush advisers and appointees, including Attorney General John Ashcroft and Solicitor General Ted Olson, who argued against the University of Michigan's affirmative-action policies before the Supreme Court. Justice Antonin Scalia is also a Federalist Society stalwart and has lent his presence to the cause.

There is an important distinction between the Federalists and ACS that goes beyond political orientation. While the Federalists remain focused on theory, the ACS goals are more activist, centering on the human consequences of judicial decision-making as well as its legal underpinnings. At a November ACS event at Georgetown Law School, for instance, former US Attorney Doug Jones recounted the challenges of bringing to justice those responsible for the 1963 Birmingham church bombing forty years after the fact, with a central theme being the principle that it's never too late to seek justice. Similarly, a program on conservative judicial activism, which featured speakers including Senator Hillary Clinton and Federal District Judge Robert Pratt, went beyond polemic and addressed the values underlying their criticisms, including the importance of protecting the rights of our most vulnerable citizens.

These are not sentiments you'd hear at a Federalist Society meeting. Nadine Strossen, a law professor at New York Law School and president of the ACLU, who has been a panelist at both Federalist Society and ACS events, says that the Federalists "seem more oriented toward intellectual discourse and a discussion of conservative doctrine than they are on doing good or helping people." The broader progressive sensibility clearly resonates with a large and untapped group of students nationwide eager for a dose of liberal activism. Rigodis Appling, one of the student founders of an ACS chapter at New York Law School, says she's seen a real change "from the conservative overtones and the reluctance to speak out" that was present "particularly after 9/11."

With a budget only about half the size of the Federalist Society's approximately $3 million a year, the ACS faces an uphill climb. But with a number of major benefactors, including the Open Society Institute, the Deer Creek Foundation and the Sandler Family Supporting Foundation, ACS is closing the gap. It's a success that can be measured not only by the support it is drawing from liberals but also by the attacks it is receiving from conservatives, such as a recent Federalist Society fundraising letter, which assailed "a new challenge" of liberal opposition and called upon its own chapters to conduct active programs "lest the high profile speakers of the ACS drown them out." Let the debate begin.

ALEXANDER WOHL

Alexander Wohl is an adjunct professor in the Department of Justice, Law and Society at American University.

In Fact . . .

THE DON'T-BLAME-US CROWD

In a Comment piece here (May 12), Wayne Smith deplored Castro's crackdown on Cuban dissidents but also scored US policy. That earned him a rebuke from ostensibly liberal *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen. He condemned Smith to obloquy as one of the "blame-America-first crowd," citing the phrase used by Jeane Kirkpatrick in a 1984 speech defending Reagan's policies, which Cohen once "hated" but now finds dead-on with regard to leftist critics of US policies. Smith differed with Cohen in a letter the *Post* hasn't published. In it he notes that, according to Kirkpatrick and apparently Cohen, "anyone who took issue with, say, the invasion of Grenada or aid to the *contras* was guilty of blaming America first. Absurd." As for Cuba, the crackdown and executions were "deplorable, reprehensible or any other condemnatory word one chooses. And certainly it is the Cuban government that must bear full responsibility." But the crackdown was "at least in part a response to the repeated provocations on the part of the US. In the real world, a superpower which threatens and undermines the stability of a small nearby country breeds fear, distrust and, occasionally, irrational reactions. It has been apparent for decades that our policy towards Cuba only serves to stifle progress towards a more open society. It is past time for the US to review its approach.... If so saying be taken as 'blaming America first,' make the most of it."

DISSENT IN ACADEME

On the commencement circuit: *New York Times* reporter Chris Hedges, author of an antiwar book, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, was booed off the stage at Rockford College in Illinois for criticizing US Iraq policy. At North Carolina State, liberal ex–TV host Phil Donahue provoked boos and walkouts when he warned about the erosion of civil liberties in the Reign of Bush.

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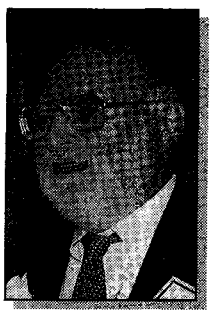

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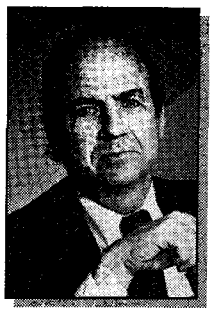

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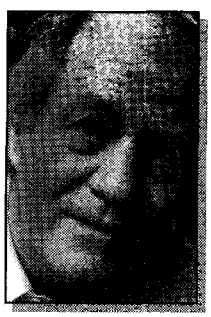

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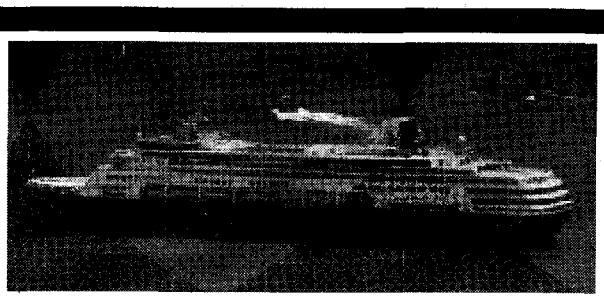
Political Satirist and *Nation* Contributing Editor

Date	Day	Ports of Call	Arrive	Depart
Dec. 6	Sat	Tampa, Florida		5:00PM
Dec. 7	Sun	Key West, Florida	11:30AM	6:00PM
Dec. 8	Mon	Day at Sea		
Dec. 9	Tue	Belize Ciy, Belize	8:00AM	6:00PM
Dec. 10	Wed	Santo Tomas de Castilla, Guatemala	6:00AM	6:00PM
Dec. 11	Thu	Cozumel, Mexico	1:00PM	11:30PM
Dec. 12	Fri	Day at Sea		
Dec. 13	Sat	Tampa, Florida	8:00AM	



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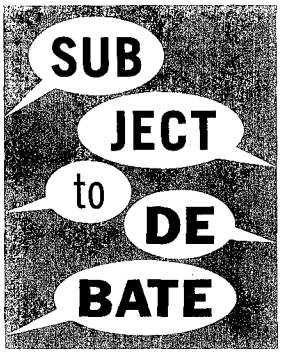
KATHA POLLITT

White Lies



The radio went on in the middle of the night and there in my ear was the voice of a young man. It was a soothing voice, deferential, quizzical, NPR-ish, the voice boy journalists in the high-end media use when they are trying to get Nazis to talk about their childhoods. And yet there was a kind of suppressed glee in it, too—as if he had just gotten the perfect quote from Adolf Jr. for his lead. Yes, the young man said ruefully, he knew people hated him; yes, he's become more religious. Well, naturally! This was Stephen Glass, the *New Republic* tale-spinner, pushing his autobiographical novel *The Fabulist*, and public contrition just goes with the territory. F. Scott Fitzgerald, who famously said there are no second acts in American lives, should only be alive to see how wrong he was.

There's one person besides his agent who should be overjoyed at Glass's splashy re-emergence from obscurity, and that is Jayson Blair. Forced out at the *New York Times* on May 1 for a wide variety of journalistic sins—plagiarizing, making things up, getting things wrong, pretending to be eyewitness reporting from Maryland and Texas while never actually leaving the city—Blair, too, has acknowledged that he was "troubled," and has an agent trying to secure a six-figure advance for a tell-all book. While no one judged Glass as a case of whiteboyism run amok, Blair, who is black, is now exhibit A for affirmative-action bashers: You see what happens when guilty liberals coddle the unqualified? Janet Cooke, the black journalist fired from the *Washington Post* after winning a Pulitzer for a fabrication, tends to come in for a mention at this point—never mind that she was canned twenty-two long years ago. Glass's reappearance is a timely reminder that liars and manipulators come in all colors of the rainbow.

Everyone is asking how these two were able to deceive so many for so long. But is it so mysterious? As many a woman has learned to her chagrin, pathological liars are brilliant at deception. They know how to make a story sparkle, they breezily proffer instant explanations for any little inconsistency, they're scheming all the time while you, their mark, are preoccupied with a hundred other things. Besides, you *want* to believe them—they're so charming, attentive and flattering. According to numerous accounts, Blair was a champion sycophant to *Times* top editor Howell Raines and Gerald Boyd, his second-in-command; Glass was the quintessential young man in a hurry, smart and needy, someone in whom his editors could see their younger selves. As *George* editor Richard Blow, one of Glass's victims, confessed in *Salon*, these professional liars know how to play to your secret wishes and preconceptions. Glass's hilarious tales—young conservatives engaging in drug-fueled orgies, women stricken en masse with crushes on UPS men—played on the desire of his wonkish Beltway editors to feel superior and in-the-know.

As Blow acknowledges, to his credit, Glass pandered to his editors' tacit racism, too. He wrote a piece for *Harper's* alleging that blacks spend tons of cash on phone psychics and one for *The New Republic* that told of his cabdriver being robbed by a black man. One of the fabrications that finally brought him down was an article for *George* alleging that Clinton adviser Vernon Jordan had Monicas of his own. It's interesting how often race and class prejudice show up in these discredited stories. Janet Cooke's Pulitzer was for a feature about an 8-year-old black heroin addict. Ruth Shalit, *The New Republic*'s star plagiarizer, attacked the *Washington Post* in an error-strewn piece for pandering to racial sensitivities. (Her editor, Andrew Sullivan, is now enjoying himself at the *Times*'s expense—but while the *Times* prostrated itself with a 14,000-word article detailing Blair's derelictions, *The New Republic* issued only pro forma regret.) Jay Forman's mostly invented *Slate* article on the obscure Florida sport of monkey-fishing in the mangroves played to stereotypes about backwoods Southerners—they eat squirrels and sleep with their sisters, so why wouldn't they fish for monkeys, too?

Blair now joins a lengthening list of disgraced journalists—don't forget Mike Barnicle (plagiarized), Patricia Smith (made up quotes and people) and my favorite ethical line-crosser, Bob Greene (slept with a high schooler who interviewed him for her school paper). The *Times* has suspended Rick Bragg, a Raines protégé whose lavishly overwritten tales of Southern life provoked many an eyeroll from acerbic New Yorkers, for excessive reliance on an uncredited volunteer stringer who did his actual reporting. Several other *Times* reporters are allegedly under investigation by management as well.

It sounds like management needs to take a look at itself, and not just about such common journalistic failings as borrowed phrases and embellished quotes. It's embarrassing to see *Times* brass flagellating themselves with tiny Blair corrections ("The sister of Corporal Gardner is named Cara, not Kara") while weighty issues of news content go unaddressed. For all their slapdash dishonesty, none of Blair's stories affected the course of any event. That cannot be said of the paper's relentless pushing of Whitewater, which helped stall a presidency but ended without a Clinton indictment, or its unfounded, life-destroying pursuit of Wen Ho Lee.

At the present moment, the question of whether Rick Bragg personally witnessed the "jumping mullet that belly-flop with a sharp clap into steel-gray water" is trivial compared with Judith Miller's credulous reports on Iraq. Here we have a Pulitzer-winning reporter who alleges that an unnamed Iraqi scientist has proof both of WMDs and of Saddam's connections with Al Qaeda and Syria. Miller got this fascinating scoop from her Army handlers—she never questioned him herself; indeed, she never even met him! She allowed the Army to vet her copy and determine the timing of its publication. Result: a front-page story that was trumpeted everywhere as the retroactive justification for war.

Where were the editors who should have reined in this Administration-friendly flight of fancy? The person who put Miller's story on page one has more to answer for than the harried administrator who didn't notice that Blair's travel receipts were from a Starbucks in Brooklyn. ■

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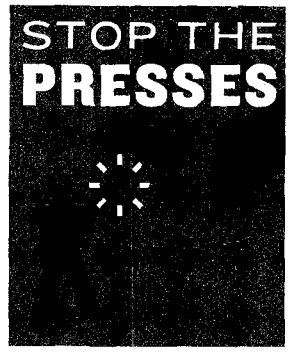
ERIC ALTERMAN

Nonagenarians Against Cynicism



Nothing deepens your cynicism quicker than the power of money in American politics.

A new report by the Center for Public Integrity tracks Federal Communications Commission officials receiving nearly $2.8 million in travel and entertainment contributions over the past eight years, nearly all of it from the industries the agency regulates. This includes 330 trips to Las Vegas alone, with another ninety-eight to London, where, I admit, the restaurants are much improved in recent years, but which does not happen to fall under the FCC's jurisdiction. The top three trip sponsors were the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Cable and Telecommunications Association and the Consumer Electronics Manufacturers Association.

When you look at the dollars the constituent companies of these trade associations stand to earn once the FCC relaxes the laws intended to preserve free speech and democratic debate in this country on June 2, you'll shake your head at just how cheaply our "democracy" sells itself. Just a few of the goodies chairman Michael Powell is wheeling and dealing away include limits on both national *and* local TV-station ownership and limits on owning both newspaper and TV stations in the same market; in other words, the very preservation of our "marketplace of ideas."

Of course, telecommunications is just one area where money speaks louder than people. While the problem of money's power has always been and will always be with us, it is, like the budget deficit, exploding under the Bush Administration. The Bush campaign raised more than $22 million in just one night recently without breaking a sweat, with Bush finishing his address promptly at 7:45, putting him back home, as one *Washington Post* wag noted, "in time to catch plenty of the Yankees and Red Sox on ESPN."

The Bushites expect to be showered with at least $200 million in the coming election cycle. This will allow them to forgo all spending limits and make life miserable for the cash-strapped Democrats 24/7. Much of this money is "donated" in order to buy big-ticket items: the despoilment of the environment, the next generation of nuclear missiles, roadblocks in the path of generic arthritis and heart-attack medicines and the like. But some of it is pure, old-fashioned job procurement. Last time around, top fundraiser—"Rangers," in the new Bush parlance—Mercer Reynolds of Cincinnati helped raise $605,082, and the next thing you know, the folks in Geneva were calling him "Mr. Ambassador." Slovakia went to Ronald Weiser of Michigan for a mere $588,309. Howard Leach of California got the hardship post of Paris for the bargain-basement price of $429,610, according to Federal Election Commission documents originally published in the *New York Times*.

And if you're looking for more reasons to be cynical, just try dipping into the 1,638-page May 2 decision on campaign finance law issued by a three-judge federal panel. Now it's official: According to Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly, a Democrat, the evidence presents a "treasure trove" of testimony from politicians and documentary evidence that large donations are given with the expectation that the cash will allow donors to influence federal decisions: "This expectation is often realized," she notes in almost perfect understatement. Judge Richard Leon, a Republican, added that the "ample evidence" of this type of thing gives rise to "an appearance of corruption." As a moody Prince of Denmark once said in another context: "Seems, madam! Nay, it is; I know not 'seems.'"

The Supreme Court will eventually decide the constitutionality of the McCain/Feingold law, but even if upheld, the law will do little to stem the tide of money that has hijacked our democracy and turned our marketplace of ideas into a mere marketplace. Money power, like most forms of tyranny and injustice, gives the rest of us two choices: Figure out new ways to fight, or play along as best we can until the Almighty orders up another flood.

Cynical about most of life, I'm still for choice one, and here's one reason: I traveled to Asheville, North Carolina, recently, invited by the inventive folks at the Mountain Area Information Network—check 'em out at www.main.nc.us—to participate in Jim Hightower's Rolling Thunder Down Home Democracy Tour. Not only did I get soaked by a genuine rolling thunderstorm, I got to spend a day with Doris Haddock, better known as "Granny D."

Now 93, she's the lady who, following her husband's death, made up her mind to walk across the entire country at age 89 to try to wake the rest of us up to the everyday corruption that underlies our electoral system. You might think anyone who did this would have to be a bit nuts. Well, perhaps, but she sounds a lot saner than I am when she explains her late-life implosion of anger at the gap between the democratic ideals she was taught nearly a century ago in her New Hampshire hometown and the contempt with which the views of a mere moneyless citizen are treated today. Doris decided that an ancient woman with arthritis and emphysema walking across the nation at a clip of ten miles a day with a straw hat on her head and a twenty-nine-pound pack on her back—eating nothing but trail mix for days at a time—might be a good way to get people's attention. Her walk did more to raise awareness about the need to reform campaign financing, said John McCain, than his own "small, modest contributions."

You can read her incredible story in the new paperback edition of her memoir, *Granny D: You're Never Too Old to Raise a Little Hell*, which, if you've still got a pulse, should deliver a powerful injection of hope and inspiration. But buy it, don't borrow it. Doris lives alone in Dublin, New Hampshire, on just her late husband's pension and her Social Security check. She can't afford to buy a *New York Times*, she says, so most days she just scans the headlines at the store. The exception to this rule are "days when we hear something about the campaign finance law," like the morning after the federal court ruled on campaign finance. Together we read the decision with a mixture of shock and anger.

Just try to put Doris's book down without wanting to raise some hell yourself. She's enough to make the most hardened cynic a believer. ■

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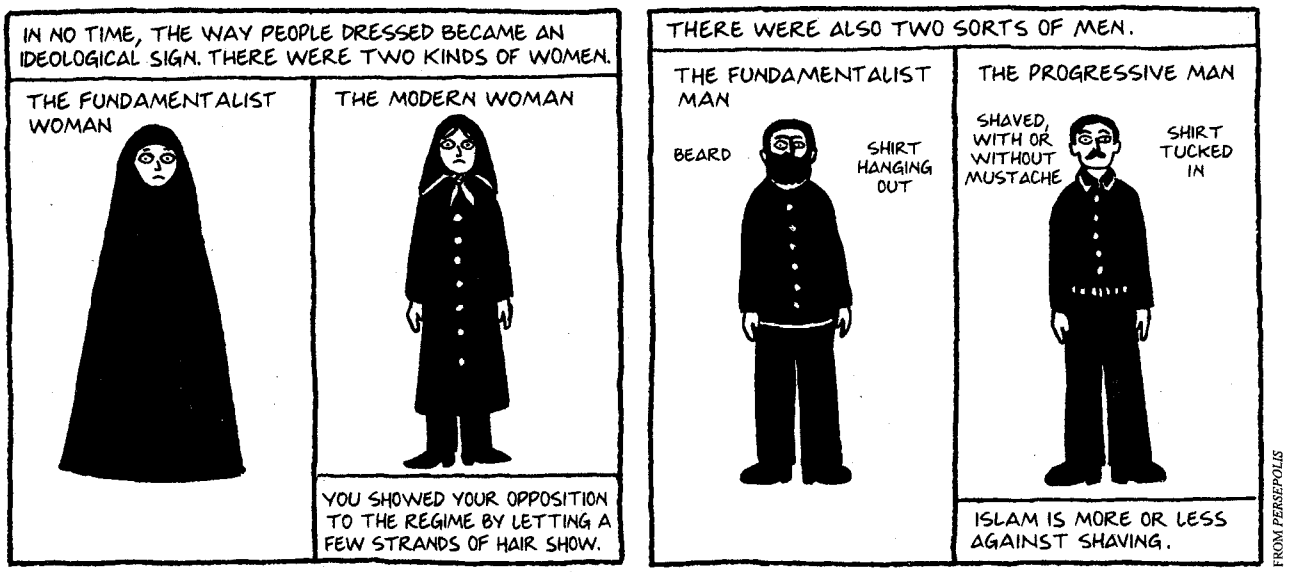
BOOKS & THE ARTS


IN NO TIME, THE WAY PEOPLE DRESSED BECAME AN IDEOLOGICAL SIGN. THERE WERE TWO KINDS OF WOMEN.
THE FUNDAMENTALIST WOMAN
THE MODERN WOMAN
YOU SHOWED YOUR OPPOSITION TO THE REGIME BY LETTING A FEW STRANDS OF HAIR SHOW.
THERE WERE ALSO TWO SORTS OF MEN.
THE FUNDAMENTALIST MAN
BEARD
SHIRT HANGING OUT
THE PROGRESSIVE MAN
SHAVED, WITH OR WITHOUT MUSTACHE
SHIRT TUCKED IN
ISLAM IS MORE OR LESS AGAINST SHAVING.

FROM *PERSEPOLIS*

The Other Iran

GLORIA EMERSON

READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN. By Azar Nafisi. Random House. 347 pp. $23.95.

PERSEPOLIS: The Story of a Childhood. By Marjane Satrapi. Pantheon. 153 pp. $17.95.

THE BATHHOUSE. By Farnoosh Moshiri. Beacon. 137 pp. $13.

In the deformed, malignant years of the Ayatollah and the mullahs, women in Iran in the 1980s sometimes found subversive ways to mutiny against the cruelties imposed on them by wrathful men. Reading forbidden novels by Nabokov, James, Fitzgerald and Austen was the loveliest kind of mutiny, and marvelously. It may be odd to most Americans that literature could be such a solace and inspiration during years of oppression—we knew this as students and have forgotten—but it is Nafisi's strongest belief that this is true. She tells us what a female student once said to her: "I don't know why people who are better off always think that those less fortunate than themselves don't want to have the good things—that they don't want to listen to good music, eat good food, or read Henry James."

It is typical of Nafisi, the passionate scholar, that she has kept pink index cards with quotes from authors, and that this encounter with the doomed student led her to

in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* we learn how a gifted teacher and writer named Azar Nafisi met with seven female students every Thursday morning for two hours to teach them these books. It was a reading group unlike any other we have ourselves known.

To make life bearable for herself and these diverse young women, Nafisi risked jail to teach her students the great gifts that art can bestow. They were so hungry to learn this. She wanted them to see that novels could transform their squashed and humiliated lives, and she seems to have succeeded

Gloria Emerson is the author, most recently, of Loving Graham Greene *(Anchor), a novel.*

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again read what Henry James wrote during World War I: "I confess that I have no philosophy, nor piety, nor patience, no art of reflection, no theory of compensation to meet things so hideous, so cruel and so mad, they are just unspeakably horrible and irremediable to me and I stare at them with angry and almost blighted eyes." Next to the last words on the pink card she wrote the girl's name: Razieh.

The room where they gathered each Thursday was spacious but sparsely furnished. The fireplace was created by her Swedish husband, Bijan, whom she had met as a student in California. A love seat was covered by lace. There was a pale peach couch, matching chairs and flowers on a large glass-topped iron table.

"That room, for all of us, became a place of transgression," Nafisi writes. "We learned without even noticing it. We were, to borrow from Nabokov, to experience how the ordinary pebble of ordinary life could be transformed into a jewel through the magic eye of fiction." She was never certain whether she chose her girls or whether they chose her. They came to her house in a "disembodied state of suspension, bringing... their secrets, pains and their gifts." She did not know if one of them would betray her to the morality police.

Nabokov is a personal favorite of Nafisi's, and she reveals to her class that what he creates in *Invitation to a Beheading* "is not actual physical pain and torture of a totalitarian regime but the nightmarish quality of living in an atmosphere of perpetual dread." All of those at the Thursday meetings knew about dread as a daily diet. Sometimes they were able to poke fun at their misery in order to survive, she writes, so there was laughter in the living room, and the flowers and food for lunches. The names of the students have the beauty of chimes: Yassi, Mitra, Nassrin, Mahshid, Manna, Azin and Sanaz. *Madame Bovary* had done what a year of teaching at the university had not: It created shared intimacy.

Students at the University of Teheran, where she once taught, were daily reminded of their own helplessness. A girl told her of having to enter a small, dark inspection room before walking on the campus. "I would first be checked to see if I have the right clothes: the color of my coat, the length of my uniform, the thickness of my scarf, the form of my shoes, the objects on my bag...the size of my rings," she said.

Because she had been educated abroad, was the daughter of a former mayor of Teheran and her mother had once been in Iran's Parliament, Nafisi knew what they were robbed of, what was always being taken away from the young women of Iran. It was hardly an ideal country for male children, either, so much more valued, because they were expected to fight in the war with Iraq, and die.

The class formed a special bond with Nabokov because "his novels are shaped around invisible trapdoors, sudden gaps that constantly pull the carpet from under the reader's feet. They are filled with mistrust of what we call everyday reality, an acute sense of fickleness and frailty," she writes.

You have to spend a lifetime reading to write as well as Nafisi does. She is incapable of writing a trite or bad sentence. Here is what she says about herself after she stopped teaching in Iran: "My main link with the outside world had been the university, and now that I had severed that link, there on the brink of the void, I could invent the violin or be devoured by the void." What a splendid instrument she has created in her memoir of her life in Teheran and of her students, whose lives she so changed at a time when the age of marriage was lowered from 18 to 9, when stoning became the punishment for adultery and prostitution. The violin she created makes the most perfect sounds.

Reading Lolita in Tehran had a most unusual effect on me. I didn't want to be interrupted, so I canceled a dental appointment and a business lunch and missed a deadline. I read and read and ignored the world. This is what brilliant books will do; they seize you until the story is over.

It has never been a habit of mine to read comic books, so I was, at first, slightly taken aback by *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, by Marjane Satrapi. But she is such a talented artist and her black-and-white drawings are so captivating, it seems wrong to call her memoir a comic book. Rather, it is a "graphic memoir" in the tradition of *Maus*, Art Spiegelman's brilliant story of the Holocaust. Like Azar Nafisi, she is of the Iranian upper class, and the great-granddaughter of Iran's last emperor. She is the daughter of radical Marxists, but this spirited and deeply imaginative child believed herself to be the last prophet at a very young age. Sometimes the drawings brilliantly show the unspeakable anxiety that afflicts Iranians. The war with Iraq hung over them like a faint smell of mustard gas. When her parents take the little girl to a hospital in Teheran they see for the first time the wounded veterans and a row of beds filled by victims of Iraq's chemical weapons.

I am grateful to Satrapi for her introduction giving a history of Iran, once the great Persian Empire, but puzzled by this sentence about the fundamentalist revolution: "I believe that an entire nation should not be judged by the wrongdoings of a few extremists." But there weren't just a few. Surely she remembers the joy felt by thousands of Iranians during the 1979–81 hostage crisis. Collaboration with the mullahs was widespread. What Satrapi hopes to do is defend her country, and her beguiling memoir should accomplish this for many readers. But read what Azar Nafisi writes in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*:

> A stern ayatollah, a self-proclaimed philosopher-king, had come to rule our land. He had come in the name of a past, a past that, he claimed, had been stolen from him. And he now wanted to re-create us in the image of that illusory past. Was it any consolation, and did we even wish to remember, that what he did to us was what we allowed him to do?

In *The Bathhouse*, a chilling novel, Farnoosh Moshiri writes of a nameless 17-year-old Iranian girl imprisoned in Teheran for her brother's radical politics although innocent of any transgression. It is written plainly—sometimes great suffering requires this—and at times with a sad poetry. The makeshift prison where she is held for a month had once been a bathhouse and is now the scene of unbearable ordeals for the women, many ordinary and innocent. What is most horrifying is that the prisoners are forced to debase themselves further by hurting others. Some prisoners are herded into the empty swimming pool while other prisoners are compelled to throw stones and pebbles at them. Those who refuse to do so are pushed into the pool themselves or shot. The narrator, wanting to stay alive, throws. The women in the pool are soon bloodied and helpless to protect themselves from the barrage.

On the last page, when she is released, the narrator writes: "The big yellow moon hung low over my head and millions of stars twinkled in the dark.... I lay in my blood, looking at the sky, thinking. What would I tell my sister when she asked, What happened in the Bathhouse?"

Moshiri based her novel on interviews with women who had been imprisoned and dedicates it to the memory of "prisoners of conscience who were executed in the prisons of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

A final small, sad note: All three women left their country, which now has such great need of them. But who among us would have stayed? Azar Nafisi and Farnoosh Moshiri both teach in the United States, and Marjane Satrapi is in Paris. ■

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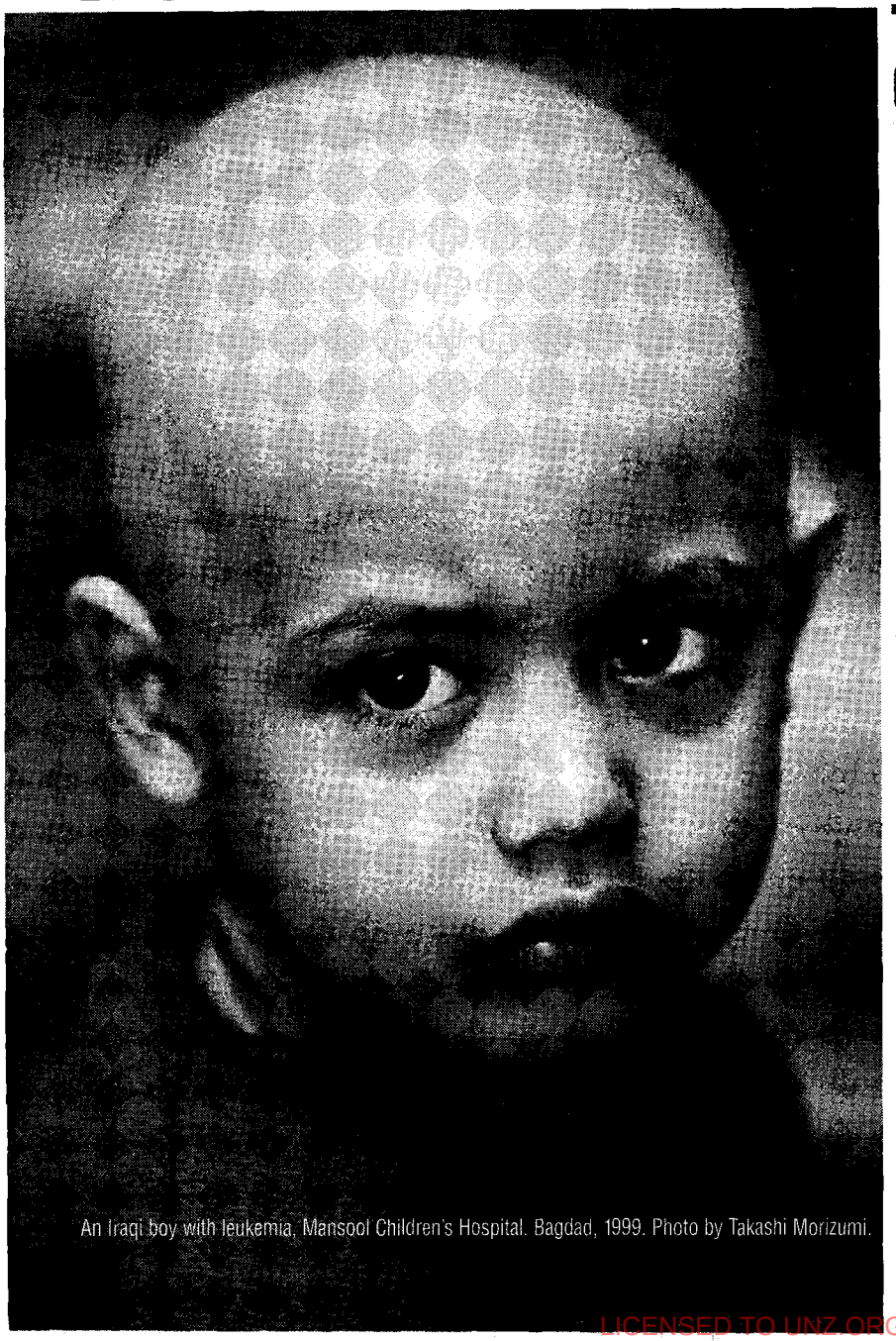

An Iraqi boy with leukemia, Mansool Children's Hospital. Bagdad, 1999. Photo by Takashi Morizumi.

birth defect rates. Is there a link? Pentagon spokesmen say No. They say Iraqi children would have to "eat enough soil contaminated with depleted uranium to suffocate" in order to be harmed. They plan no cleanup, no health monitoring. Depleted uranium, they scoff, is harmless.

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Far From Heaven

MICHAEL LIND

INTERRACIAL INTIMACIES: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption.
By Randall Kennedy. Pantheon. 676 pp. $30.

RACE MIXING: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America.
By Renee C. Romano. Harvard. 368 pp. $35.

During the early years of the civil rights revolution, Theodore Bilbo, the ferocious segregationist senator from Mississippi, published a book titled *Take Your Choice: Separation or Mongrelization.* He argued that the inevitable result of the abolition of formal racial segregation would be racial amalgamation. He was right, according to new studies of racial intermarriage by Randall Kennedy and Renee Romano. In the words of Romano, "The old segregationist fear that integration would lead to 'race mixing' was well founded."

Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America by Renee Romano, assistant professor of history and African-American studies at Wesleyan University, is a straightforward chronicle of laws and mores governing black-white unions in America, from the colonial era through the segregationist period to the present. Randall Kennedy, a Harvard Law professor and a noted public intellectual, follows up *Race, Crime and the Law* and *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* with a more expansive and detailed study of the theme in *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption.*

Different in genre and scale, the two books address the same phenomenon: the erosion of the taboo against black-white intermarriage, a taboo far older and deeper than those against unions between whites and Native Americans, Latinos or Asians (a subject they treat only incidentally). The number of black-white married couples has risen from 51,000 in 1960, when only 1.7 percent of married black Americans had a white spouse, to 363,000 in 2000, when 4.3 percent of blacks had white spouses. When interracial marriages of all kinds are counted, the numbers have risen from 0.4 percent of the total in 1960 to almost 2 percent in 2000.

The numbers may be small, but the rate of increase represents a genuine revolution in American society, where for centuries harsh laws penalized interracial unions. In the nineteenth century white hostility to interracial marriage was almost universal. As Kennedy notes, most Northerners in the Civil War and Reconstruction eras supported separate-but-equal arrangements in the laws governing marriage and other social interactions. He quotes Lincoln's ally, the

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Illinois Republican Senator Lyman Trumbull: "If the negro is denied the right to marry a white person, [and] the white person is equally denied the right to marry the negro[,] I see no discrimination against either." Neither the Civil Rights Act of 1866 nor the Fourteenth Amendment would have passed if it had intended to strike down laws against interracial marriage. Lincoln himself repeatedly justified the colonization of black Americans in Africa, the Caribbean and Central America, a policy he inherited from his heroes Henry Clay and Thomas Jefferson and abandoned only reluctantly in the course of the Civil War, on the grounds that only the expatriation of blacks could remove the alleged danger of racial amalgamation (known by the pejorative term "miscegenation").

Kennedy observes, "After Ohio repealed its antimiscegenation laws in 1887, no other state followed its lead until Oregon finally did so in 1951—sixty-four years later. In the sixteen years after that, however, more than a dozen states repealed their statutes: Montana (1953), North Dakota (1955), Colorado and South Dakota (1957), California, Nevada, and Idaho (1959), Arizona (1962), Utah and Nebraska (1963), Indiana and Wyoming (1965), and Maryland (1967)." In 1940, thirty-one of the forty-eight states banned interracial marriage. As recently as 1960, Sammy Davis Jr. postponed his wedding to the Swedish actress May Britt until after the election, in order not to hurt the Democrats—and was rewarded with exclusion from John F. Kennedy's inaugural festivities.

But by 1967, when the Supreme Court struck down bans on interracial marriage in *Loving v. Virginia*, only sixteen states still had such laws. In *Loving v. Virginia*, a white man, Richard Loving, and his black wife, Mildred Jeter, were arrested in Virginia on the grounds that their marriage license from the District of Columbia was invalid and that they had violated the sinister-sounding Racial Integrity Act. They were given a choice of a one-year jail term or exile from Virginia for twenty-five years by the lower court judge, Leon Bazile, who declared: "Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents.... The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix." (One wonders if conservative Virginia Christians noticed the judge's dismissal of the biblical story of the common origin of humanity in favor of the non-Christian Deist theory of "polygenesis.") In his majority opinion for the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Earl Warren ignored the Fourteenth Amendment and argued that the Virginia law violated the equal protection clause and fundamental privacy.

As Kennedy points out, many sponsors of the Fourteenth Amendment "explicitly announced that it would not encroach upon states' authority to impose racially neutral prohibitions on interracial marriage. This history poses a dilemma for thoroughgoing originalists who object to antimiscegenation laws. If they are to stay true to their interpretive philosophy, such originalists must concede that *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia* was wrongly decided." He then twists the knife in a footnote: "It is a delicious irony that the most fervent champion of originalism on the Supreme Court in recent memory is an African-American—Justice Clarence Thomas—who was married in Virginia to a white woman named Virginia."

In another footnote, Kennedy writes, "It

Michael Lind is the Whitehead Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation and author of Made in Texas: George W. Bush and the Southern Takeover of American Politics *(Basic).*

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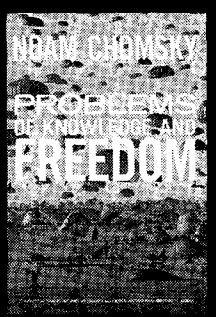

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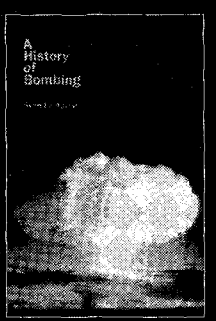

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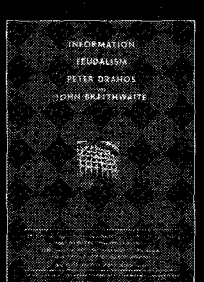

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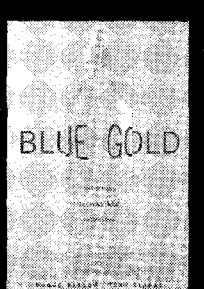

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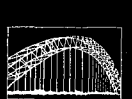

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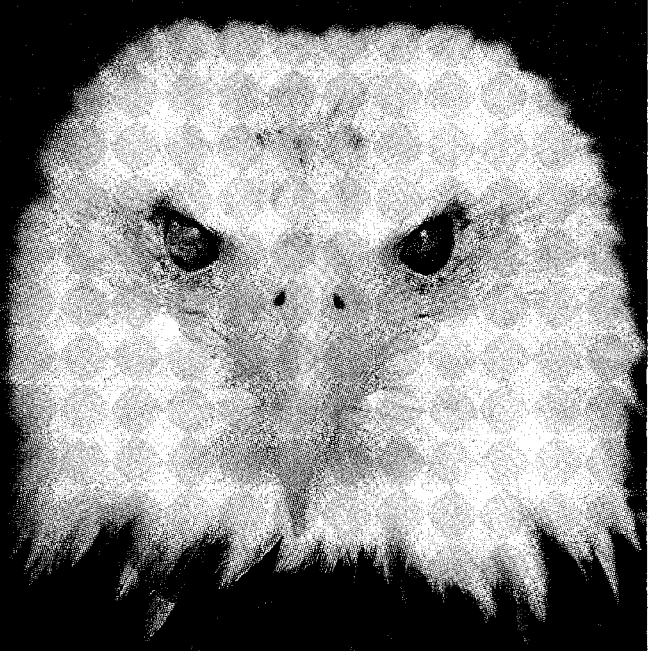

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is my own belief that the struggle to secure the right to marry regardless of the genders of the parties involved will be won in the not so distant future," in part as a result of "previous struggles over race relations." Kennedy's faith that the federal courts, rather than legislatures, will act as the vanguard of progress in civil rights may be tested in an era in which Republican Presidents will have stacked the federal judiciary with conservatives. If even Democrats like Bill Clinton scrambled to support the Defense of Marriage Act, what is to prevent a loose-constructionist Supreme Court stacked by right-wing Republicans from pretending to discover a ban on gay marriage in the Constitution and striking down all state and local laws recognizing gay unions? Judicial activism can be used on behalf of conservative as well as liberal conceptions of civil liberties.

Kennedy argues that racial thinking in the United States is divided between an optimist tradition and a pessimist tradition. As an example of the pessimist tradition, he cites Thomas Jefferson, whose enthusiasm for solving America's race "problem" by deporting blacks to some foreign country was shared by Henry Clay, Abraham Lincoln and—in the twentieth century—Theodore Bilbo. The optimists "have included Frederick Douglass, Lydia Maria Child, Wendell Phillips, and Martin Luther King Jr." Today's pessimists can find evidence of the enduring power of the black-white dichotomy in the discrepancy in intermarriage rates among different groups. According to Romano, "Over 50 percent of Native Americans marry outside their racial group, while 25 percent of Asians do. In 1990, by comparison, only 6 percent of married blacks had nonblack (primarily white) spouses." The number rises to 10.8 percent if only first-time marriages are counted, however. Although voters removed inoperative but still offensive prohibitions against racial intermarriage in the constitutions of Mississippi (1987), South Carolina (1998) and Alabama (2000), Romano cites ample anecdotal evidence suggesting that the South is still far more hostile to interracial unions than the rest of the country.

Racial optimists, however, can find support for their view as well. Romano quotes a 1997 Gallup poll in which 61 percent of white respondents claimed to approve of interracial marriage. Although some vocal black nationalists continue to oppose intermarriage, according to a 2001 poll cited by Romano two-thirds of black men and one-half of black women had dated a person of another race.

Racial optimists tend to emphasize class differences rather than bigotry as the chief barrier to an even higher rate of racial amalgamation in the United States. The importance of social equality as a precondition for intermarriage is illustrated by the fact that personnel in the US military, an artificially egalitarian and meritocratic subculture, have a higher rate of interracial marriage than the rest of society. White male soldiers are three times more likely than white male civilians, and white female soldiers seven times more likely than white female civilians, to take black marriage partners.

According to Kennedy: "The extent to which racial minorities are conspicuously encumbered by poverty, unemployment, lesser educational opportunities, and like deprivations is the *minimum* extent to which they will continue to be marginalized in the common market for companionship." Romano agrees that the major barrier to racial amalgamation is no longer caste but class: "Income inequality and school and residential segregation not only act as bar-

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riers preventing blacks and whites from meeting in situations that might lead to dating, but also continue the racial disadvantages that make blacks less attractive as marital partners.... Marriage between blacks and whites will not become commonplace until race is no longer a marker of privilege or disadvantage."

The small but growing minority of children with parents of different races is calling America's centuries-old racial classification system into question. Should children of interracial marriages be classified as "multiracial," "biracial"—or not racially classified at all? The campaign to add a "multiracial" category to the census of 2000 was defeated by the black civil rights establishment, which feared that the numbers of "official" blacks would decline as a result. Ironically, black civil rights leaders are today the last defenders of the "one-drop rule," inherited from American apartheid, which says that anyone with even one African ancestor is "black." They succeeded in blocking the adoption of a multiracial category by the census, which, however, permitted individuals to check more than one box. This political compromise, which had the absurd result of allowing the US population to add up to more than 100 percent of itself, permitted almost 785,000 Americans to say that they were both black and white. (Don't even ask about "Hispanics/Latinos," a category that is based on immigration or descent from immigrants from a particular designated set of foreign nations, and includes people of all "races.")

The "multiracial" and "biracial" labels are based on the premise that most American people are divided "naturally," as it were, into five distinct races, and that all other Americans must be defined in relation to two or more of the big five. Even if it had a name other than "multiracial" or "biracial," a proposed sixth official US race would still be a catchall category. The children of white-Asian marriages may have nothing in common with those of Asian-Latino marriages, and they form at best a mere statistical category, not a genuine cultural "community."

The attempt of government to pigeonhole Americans by race is most obnoxious in the case of "race-matching," or the attempt to match adopted children to adoptive parents of their own official "race." Kennedy's passionate and well-reasoned polemic against this concludes: "The United States should prohibit all governments under its aegis—federal, state, and tribal—from engaging in race matching." He goes further: "If dismantling [racial] affirmative action must be part of the price of effectively doing away with race matching, it is no more than I, for one, am willing to pay."

The insistence of many progressives that the elimination of government racial labels and race-specific policies must await the complete extinction of racist sentiments in the American population reverses the cause-and-effect relationship. It makes no sense to say that race doesn't matter, on the one hand, while insuring that how the federal government classifies your race makes a difference in access to benefits or even to adoptive parents. The fact that there are still bigots in America should not prevent the federal government from treating all Americans as individuals. And if conservatives want to quote Martin Luther King Jr. and adopt the liberal integrationist position as their own, this is proof of the success of the civil rights revolution in transforming American thinking about race even on the right.

We will never eliminate the vestiges of caste from this society by multiplying the number of castes. The United States ought to go from having five official races to having none—preferably by

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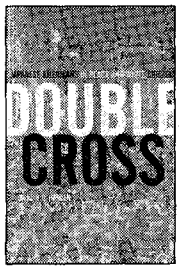

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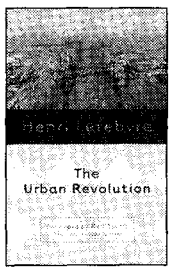

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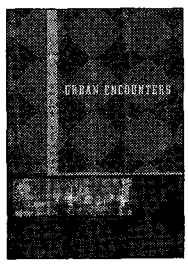

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the census of 2010 or 2020. The mainstream left opposes the abolition of racial classifications because it wants to preserve race-based social programs like affirmative action—while the mainstream right has appealed to white backlash by adopting the color-blind ideal of liberal integrationists as its own. Whatever one thinks of the motives of the right, the race-conscious left has pursued a failed strategy since the civil rights revolution. Need-based social programs, which benefit the black and Latino poor disproportionately even if they help a greater number of needy whites, are far more popular than race-specific programs with white voters, who will remain a majority of the electorate until late in this century or beyond. The warnings of liberal integrationists like Bayard Rustin against the left's adoption of programs that don't benefit at least some whites have been vindicated—along with the prediction of conservative segregationists like Bilbo—that the end of segregation would lead to the blending of the races in America.

"Malignant racial biases can and do reside in interracial liaisons," Kennedy observes. "But against the tragic backdrop of American history, the flowering of multiracial intimacy is a profoundly moving and encouraging development, one that lends support to Frederick Douglass's belief that eventually 'the white and colored people of this country [can] be blended into a common nationality, and enjoy together... the inestimable blessings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'" ■

The Mark of Cain

MICHAEL TOLKIN

THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE, DOUBLE INDEMNITY, MILDRED PIERCE AND SELECTED STORIES.
By James M. Cain. Everyman's Library/Random House. 560 pp. $23.

Somewhere, and it's not in this new Everyman's Library edition, James M. Cain betrayed a state secret when he said that "a writer can only write two hours a day." The truth in this observation more than makes up for a small perjury in his introduction to his novel *The Butterfly*: "Except personally, with many engaged in it, I am not particularly close to the picture business, and have not been particularly successful in it. True, several of my stories have made legendary successes when adapted for films.... I have learned a great deal from pictures, mainly technical things. Yet in the four years or more that I have actually spent on picture lots, I have accumulated but three fractional credits." With his little shrug of "or more," as though it might be five, five and a half years, Cain hides, I think from himself, the fifteen years since leaving *The New Yorker* as managing editor and moving to Los Angeles under contract with Paramount. By the time he left Hollywood in 1947, those three fractional credits were *Algiers*, *Stand Up and Fight* and *Gypsy Wildcat*. But Hollywood was his day job, and in the same time he wrote his greatest books, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Double Indemnity* and *Mildred Pierce*, all in this collection, along with five stories exhumed from dead magazines. It took Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder to adapt *Double Indemnity*, almost as faithful a job of typing as John Huston's script for *The Maltese Falcon*. It took Faulkner to adapt Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, and the only writer who should or could have adapted the Faulkner best suited for film, *The Wild Palms*, was Cain.

It's a shame that this really wonderful introduction isn't included in this collection, because Cain knew how good he was, and says so:

> I belong to no school, hard-boiled or otherwise, and I believe these so-called schools exist mainly in the imagination of critics.... Schools don't help the novelist but they do the critic; using as mucilage the simplifications that the school hypothesis affords him, he can paste labels wherever convenience is served by pasting labels, and although I have read less than twenty pages of Mr. Dashiell Hammet in my whole life, Mr. Clifton Fadiman can refer to my hammet-and-tongs style and make things easy for himself.

Answering what he takes as an irrelevant comparison, he says:

The paperback edition of Michael Tolkin's third novel, Under Radar, *has just been published by Grove Atlantic.*

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> I know no debt, beyond the pleasure his books have given me, to Mr. Ernest Hemingway.... I grant, of course, that even such resemblances between Mr. Hemingway and myself do make for a certain leanness in each of us...and might be taken, by those accustomed to thinking in terms of schools, as evidence that I had in some part walked in his footsteps. Unfortunately for this theory, however, although I didn't write my first novel until 1933, when he was ten years on his way as a novelist, I am actually six years and twenty-one days older than he is, and had done a mountain of writing, in newspapers and magazines, including dialogue sketches, short stories, and one performed play, before he appeared on the scene at all.

I hadn't read James M. Cain in more than twenty years and wasn't sure I wanted to, if it meant finding the crumbs in his beard. When I read Chandler now I want to take his arm from around my shoulders, squeezing me at every metaphor. The thousand tough-guy books written by his imitators, in devotion, have softened the punch of his language, and I already know the stories. Reading Cain again, I am surprised not that he holds up but that seventy years later, his prickly defensiveness seems like modesty. He's one of the great writers.

That first novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), the story of a short-order cook dragged into murder, and *Double Indemnity* (1936) are simple stories with the same pattern: first-person confessions written a few feet from the grave by the most ordinary men. A woman gets her lover to kill her husband, in a scheme doomed to failure, but no one has the will to change their fate. "I think my stories," wrote Cain, "have some quality of the opening of a forbidden box, and that it is this, rather than violence, sex...that gives them the drive so often noted.... The reader is carried along by his own realization that the characters cannot have this particular wish and survive."

In *Double Indemnity*, Walter Huff, a confident insurance salesman, calls on a home during the day to get a customer to revise his life insurance. He's not home but his wife is. They flirt, he comes back, the man is still not home, the wife asks him, "Mr. Huff, would it be possible for me to take out a policy *for* him, without bothering him about it at all?" He "couldn't be mistaken about what she meant, not after fifteen years in the insurance business." He knows she means murder, and then he fucks her, knowing exactly what will happen; kills the husband in a stupid contrivance of suicide; and just as he expected, it's not the police but his supervisor who solves the crime, which is no small twist: This is the heart of Cain's theology. In *Double Indemnity*, Cain refutes Einstein. God does play dice, and he knows when the dice are loaded.

The secret of the book was teased open by the title, which is more than an ironic rotation of a melodious legal term. If the world of *Double Indemnity* is under the rule of the law, it is law as a manic anticipation of action, in a universe where the possibility for action is determined by probability and any action not anticipated by probability is by definition criminal. Cain doesn't find the plot for crime in psychology, but in an actuarial table with the scope of Adam naming everything in Eden. As Huff's supervisor puts it:

> Here's suicide by race, by color, by occupation, by sex, by locality, by seasons of the year, by time of day when committed. Here's suicide by method of accomplishment. Here's method of accomplishment subdivided by poisons, by firearms, by gas, by drowning, by leaps.... and here...are leaps subdivided by leaps from high places, under wheels of moving trains, under wheels of trucks, under the feet of horses, from steamboats. *But there's not one case here out of all these millions of cases of a leap from the rear end of a moving train.* That's just one way they don't do it.

It takes nothing away from *Postman* and *Double Indemnity* to put them on the crime shelf, the honestly arranged shelf that would also include Dostoyevsky and Highsmith. Like Cain, Patricia Highsmith wasn't insulted by the genre labels. She was proud enough to write the useful and friendly book *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*. But if we arrange by genre and not by alphabet, *Mildred Pierce* doesn't belong there. It's as good a novel as *Daniel Deronda* and *Anna Karenina*.

Early in the Depression, late in Prohibition, a middle-class Glendale mother of two girls leaves her husband. She makes a few dollars baking cakes and pies for neighbors, but it's not enough. Offices aren't hiring typists, stores aren't hiring salesgirls, so she gets a job as a waitress, hiding her uniform from her children, especially her favorite, Veda, a talented pianist and snob. The reflexive critical opinion of Mildred is that all her work and sacrifice are for Veda, but this follows the movie, not the novel. She works and grows because she likes it, because she sees opportunity, because she's good at what she does, because she loves her success for itself. Mildred sells her pies to the restaurant and then

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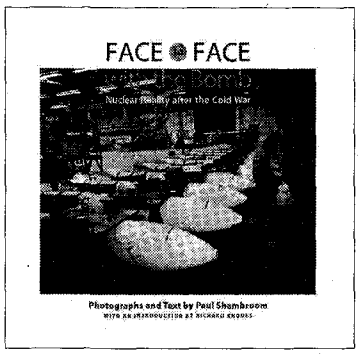

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opens her own, hiring friends as staff. She falls in love with a Pasadena playboy living off a dwindling family fortune, even though "she had a growing suspicion that to him she was a servant girl, an amusing servant girl, one with pretty legs and a flattering response in bed." She opens two more restaurants, and without becoming wealthy, has all the money she needs for herself, a good piano and Veda's music. Veda fails as a pianist. "Can't you understand anything at all?" she says. "They don't pay off on work, they pay off on talent! *I'm just no good!* I'M NO GOD-DAMN GOOD AND THERE'S NOTHING THAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT!" Veda is wrong: She's just not a pianist, she's a singer, and not just a singer, but cursed with the gifts of a great coloratura. Mr. Treviso, the music teacher, as sure of genius and the life of artists as Klesmer in *Daniel Deronda*, tells Mildred:

> Madame, is a special fancy breed, like blue Persian cat. Come once in a lifetime.... And dees girl, is a coloratura, even a bones is coloratura.... All a coloratura crazy for rich pipple, all take no give, all act like a duchess, all twiddle a la valiere...all borrow ten t'ousand bucks, go to Italy, study voice, never pay back a money, tink was all friendship. Sing in grand opera, marry a banker, get da money. Got da money, kick out a banker, marry a baron, get da title. 'Ave a sweetie on a side, guy she like to sleep wit'. Den all travel together, all over Europe, grand opera to grand opera, 'otel—a baron, 'e travel in Compartment C, take care of dog. A banker, 'e travel in Compartment B, take care of luggage. A sweetie, 'e travel in Drawing Room A, take care of coloratura—all one big 'appy family.

The playboy sponges off of Mildred as his fortune collapses, Mildred supports him, Veda goes national, and after that even more things happen, which you can read in the book.

The "technical things" Cain learned from the movies showed him how to compress into 300 pages everything we love in the nineteenth-century novel: the sense of time passed, of fluctuating social classes in a specific moment in a country's history; shifting love stories; the rendering of a few lives into all lives, so that even the worst that people do is written from a distance, under the influence of divine attributes of mercy with enough perspective to see this as if from a long time later, as something so old and so often repeated that with all the shock there has to be laughter, without mockery.

Here, the opening lines of the book, a description of Mildred's husband, Bert:

> In the spring of 1931, on a lawn in Glendale, California, a man was bracing trees. It was a tedious job, for he had first to prune dead twigs, then wrap canvas buffers around weak branches, then wind rope slings over the buffers and tie them to the trunks, to hold the weight of the avocados that would ripen in the fall.

Tedious is the key word in the line, because even though Mildred leaves Bert for good reasons—doesn't make money, has a floozy—Cain slides a barely visible respect into our first impression of him. Whatever else is wrong with Bert, Cain never loses respect for him, because he works hard, and of the three great subjects of the novel—work, marriage and family—work comes first.

When we first meet Mildred, after Bert gets off the ladder and takes a bath, she's working too, icing a four-layer cake that she's

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selling for $3. They soon fight about Bert's girlfriend. Mildred

> had little to say about love, fidelity, or morals. She talked about money, and his failure to find work; and when she mentioned the lady of his choice, it was not as a siren who had stolen his love, but as the cause of the shiftlessness that had lately come over him.... They spoke quickly, as though they were saying things that scalded their mouths, and had to be cooled with spit. Indeed, the whole scene had an ancient, almost classical ugliness to it, for they uttered the same recriminations that have been uttered since the beginning of marriage, and added little of originality to them, and nothing of beauty.

So there's the challenge Cain gives himself, to tell a story that he knows is tired, and to give it beauty. "Classical ugliness" could be a weak, too clever, formulation, something empty that sounds like it means something, but Cain means it in the way that *Electra* is an ugly play, that Greek tragedy is harsh. The novel is harsh. Veda is one of literature's monsters, but as the victim of her own voice, she is both awful and not responsible. The agony for everyone, even Veda, is her voice, ruin and salvation. Cain gives Veda's voice the same power as the Depression, moving the world around them all. In the three novels and the short stories, Cain's Depression is an endless flood that might have been written by J.G. Ballard, larger than any one place; the whole country is on planet Depression, which flattens the world. The Depression traps everyone, puts them to a test they don't have to look for, and when they fail that test, Cain doesn't blame them. So it is with the coloratura.

Were she only an opera singer, like Madame Modjeska in Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy*, an angel from the higher realms, the book would collapse into kitsch, but this is a book about a bakery, after all, so Veda achieves fame and money singing on the radio for Sunbake vitamin bread. Out of this absurd incongruity comes the final scene between Mildred and Bert, and in the resolution of their quarrel Cain restores beauty.

Cain likes sex and he knows that everyone fucks, and knows that the reader in the 1930s knew that everyone fucked and not to pretend that sex is news or that sex is something that happens as it does in books; the earth never moves. "So, with the door tightly locked, the shades pulled down, and the keyhole stuffed up, they resumed their romance, there in the den. Romance, perhaps, wasn't quite the word, for of that emotion she felt not the slightest flicker. Whatever it was, it afforded two hours of relief, of forgetfulness." Or: "She spanked him on his lean rump, hustled him out of bed, and jumped out after him."

And has anyone ever written more casually about Los Angeles? Has a novelist frustrated by the studios ever cared less about getting even with the place, to pit his too-sensitive soul against Moloch, and make his novel a message in a bottle sent from Hell? *Mildred Pierce* is a message sent from Glendale, and Glendale stands for nothing more than any suburban town anywhere in the country, and he gives it no symbolic meaning. If anything, he admires the town that offers struggling people like Mildred and her crew in the restaurants a chance to work for themselves.

Cain's picture of Southern California is as neutral as photographs of old Hollywood; only by comparison with the way it looks today does an empty beanfield tell us something. The beanfield in *Mildred Pierce* is the two and a half hours it takes to drive from Glendale to Lake Arrowhead, which in those days meant

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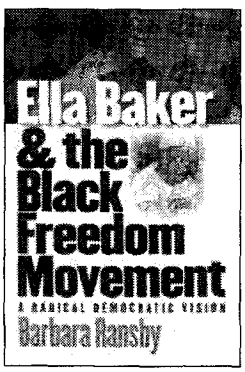

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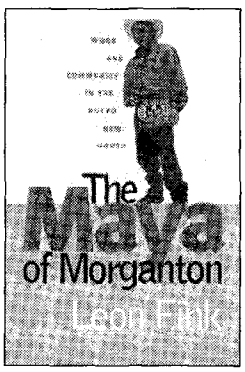

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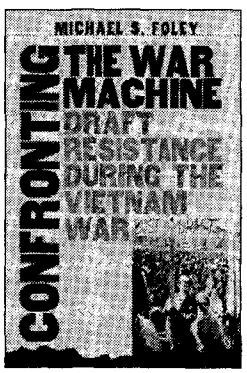

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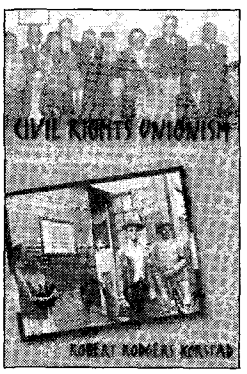

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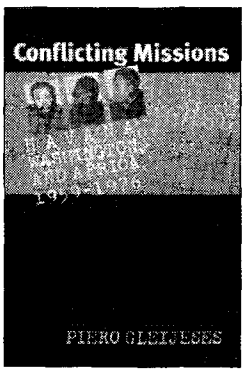

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the main road to San Bernardino, turning left and driving up thirty or so miles of narrow mountain road. This is faster than I can get there now, unless I leave at 7 in the morning on a Sunday, faster by an hour if I leave during Friday rush hour. An evening's spontaneous drive from Glendale to Laguna, for dinner, now belongs in the same book of travel wonders as a six-month trip around Cape Horn.

Cain's fans will miss *Serenade*, the only book in the genre of opera singers on the lam in Mexico, but it's not hard to find. Robert Polito's biographical and critical introduction is a model of appreciation, with which I have one quarrel. Assessing the decline of Cain's work, Polito writes, "Serious artists overtaken by the popularity they sought—Welles, Warhol, Brando, Dylan—sometimes lose their way. Cain was not one who found his way back." Is it an American demand that you're only as good as your next picture? He's asking Cain to be a success like Veda Pierce, always moving to the higher level, but Cain stays with Mildred at the end, leaving Veda, awful but without punishment, to her golden future, in as close an opinion on his time in show business and Hollywood as Cain will venture. So there are sure to be some readers who take the last lines of the book as Mildred's way of throwing herself under the train, but I think we can leave Mildred with as much triumph as Cain believes possible, the main work, but not the life, completed. Give him the same respect. He left Hollywood, moved to Maryland, and kept at his two hours a day. If ours is not the last generation of posterity, if the era to come has any memory, time may yet bring his later writing into focus, but if not, we don't need and shouldn't ask for any more from James M. Cain than the books in this collection. ■

The Liar

EMILY NUSSBAUM

THE FABULIST. By Stephen Glass. Simon & Schuster. 342 pp. $24.

Steal this book.

You know you want to. After all, no right-minded person wants to give money to serial confabulator Stephen Glass, formerly employed by *The New Republic*. No one wants to repay him for this second act, this memoir wrapped in a novel wrapped in a film deal, this apology shaped suspiciously like a grenade. Even writing this review continues the terrible cycle, and don't I know it. (You can borrow my free copy, if you want.)

But you want to read it. Or at least, I did. I've always been a fan of queasy reality performances: half truth, half manipulation. I loved Dave Eggers's anti-memoir, studded as it was with pre-emptive self-criticism. I'm a fan of Philip Roth, whatever his crimes against Claire Bloom. I've got no objection to reading books by people who've acted like jerks; if I did, it would massively cut down my reading list. And I've never met Stephen Glass, never edited him; he never weaseled into my good graces, or played on my narcissism.

And of course, Glass couldn't have timed the book's release any better: It arrives on shelves just as Jayson Blair, formerly of the *New York Times*, goes down in flames, igniting that paper's editorial hierarchy like kindling stuffed under the logs. But distinctions must be made: If the Jayson Blair story is news, his failings aren't (to my mind) journalism's failings. For all the handwringing, no profession is free of cheats and con men. Lies aren't new; neither is schmoozing and/or drug abuse. And whatever the institutional errors that helped shove Blair up the greasy pole, he is, from all accounts, a chaotic schmuck, not a symbolic antihero.

Not so Stephen Glass. Stephen Glass I've always found creepy in a meaningful way—the bogyman in the journalist's closet. There's a Gothic quality to Glass's transgressions: a primal violation of the writer/editor relationship. After all, he wasn't a sloppy reporter. He was too neat, thrilling his editors with cynical inventions like the First Church of George Herbert Walker Christ. He carefully covered his tracks with fake fact-checking materials. Hell, he was so trusted his boss had him reorganize *The New Republic*'s fact-checking department. In perhaps his ickiest takedown, he wrote a fraudulent profile smearing Clinton crony Vernon Jordan as a lecher. But if Blair's fellow reporters universally describe his sharp elbows, Glass seems to have had no elbows whatsoever. He cuddled up to his colleagues, begging for approval—he was obsequious, smart, slippery. He always struck me as a real character, which is why I was secretly delighted (which is to say, appalled) that he had written a sort-of autobiography, with a central character named Stephen Glass. I wanted to know what he was thinking.

What he was thinking about, from this account, was not much. Like any compulsive bullshitter, Glass was too focused on plugging leaks to think about the plumbing. The book begins as the fictional Stephen Glass's editor at *The Washington Weekly*, Robert Underwood (in real life, Charles Lane), leaves a series of increasingly distraught messages on his answering machine. As I read this first third—and the events here are fairly indistinguishable from what happened, except for the con's-eye view—I gulped it down, lit up with Nixonian sweat. Here was the fatal confrontation in his editor's office; here the drive when Glass feebly pointed to locations, trying to convince his editor he'd attended a conference he had in fact fabricated. It's Kafka, except for the fact that Glass is unambiguously guilty, guilty, guilty, and also the fact that Stephen Glass is not Kafka.

In the aftermath of these events, Glass is chased down like Frankenstein by the maddened journalists bearing tape recorders. Glass's brother gives Stephen a tough-love admonishment: "These people aren't going to forgive you. That's the way they see the world: no mercy." It's a convenient theory, since Glass never actually tried to do anything to gain mercy—even apologize in person. There's a wildly self-serving moral continuum being dished up here: Forgiveness is good, Glass suggests, and people who forgive readily (indeed, often without knowing the original offense) are the elect, possessing a generosity of spirit that is the opposite of journalism. People who won't forgive—betrayed girlfriend, seething colleagues, Javert-like boss—are ungood. And journalists who regard him as a news story? In the final scenes of the book, one tormentor goes so far as to kidnap a sick, shivering dog, all the while screaming in Stephen's face.

Like Roxie Hart warning us off jazz and liquor, this is a pretty lame apology. And surely, the best way to get you to not buy the book would be to just dismiss it. But let's put the truth moose on the table: I read *The Fabulist* ravenously, satisfying my curiosity for free. What did it feel like to get praise for stories he knew were lies? How did Glass talk his brother into recording a fake voice-mail message for him? What

Emily Nussbaum, a former editor at Nerve, *writes for* Slate *and the* New York Times.

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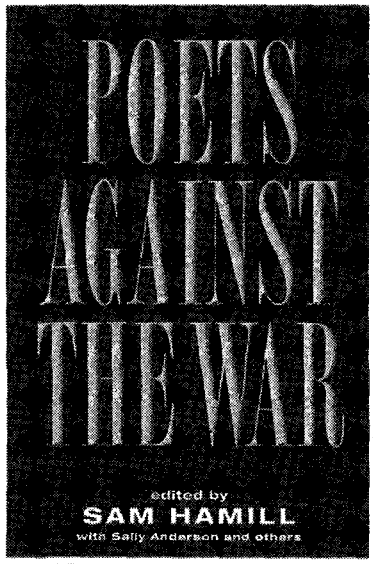

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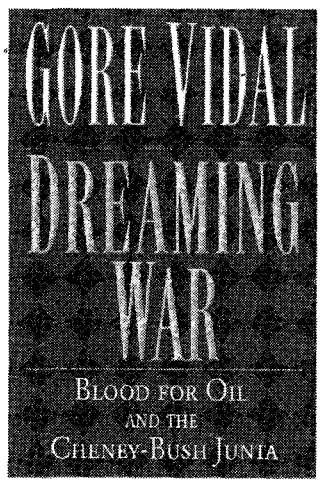

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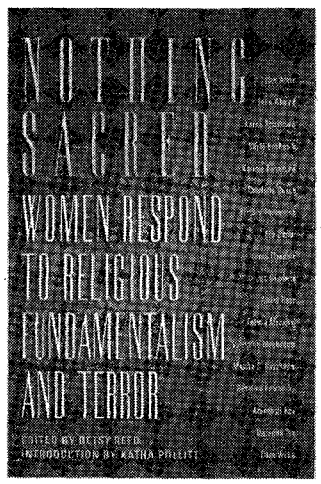

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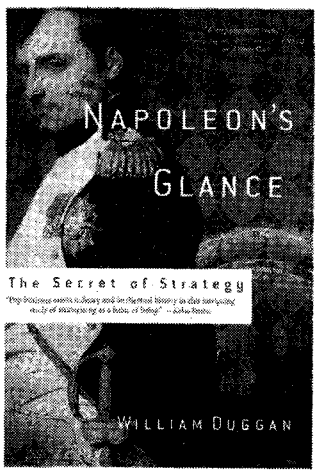

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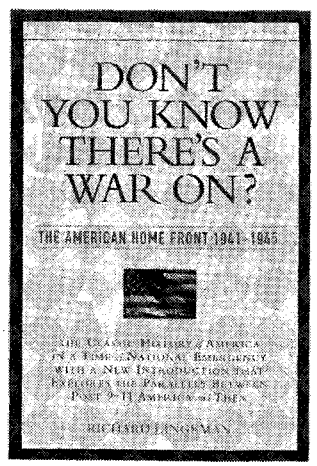

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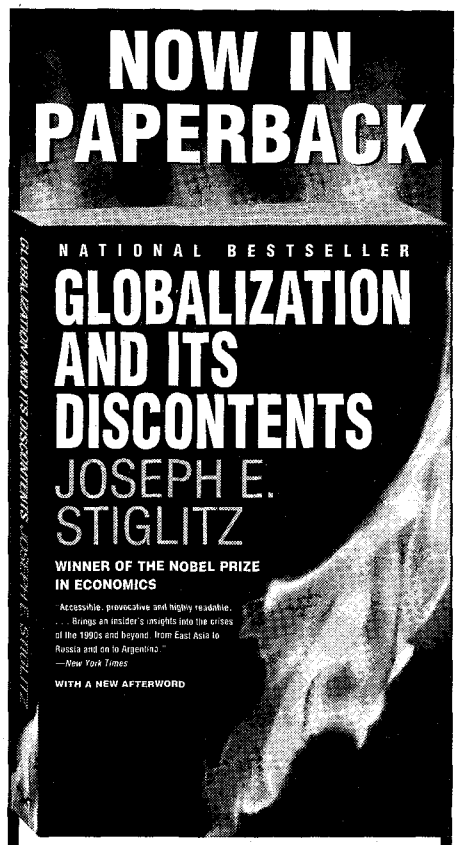
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the hell was he thinking when he concocted false phone transcripts for the fact checker? (There's a scene in which Glass types the fake quotes into his word processor and then scrolls up and down in a panic, inserting typos, spaces, ellipses, all the while speaking the interview out loud in two different voices.)

Glass answers all these questions, kinda sorta, but since he does so in the form of a novel—as Hendrik Hertzberg pointed out in *The New Yorker*, he's switched from "fictional nonfiction" to "nonfictional fiction"—he also frustrates a reader's desire to trust his revelations. In fact, amid the apologies, the book coyly reproduces the very thing that got him into trouble in the first place. Too-good-to-be-true stories abound: Glass dons garbage-bag underpants, has a one-night stand with a scheming journalist. In an attempt to get into character for the fake interview transcript, a panicky Glass cakes his face with his girlfriend's makeup. The reader knows this isn't what happened; in real life, the story he faked included quotes from imaginary computer hackers, not an imaginary old lady. But did he do something like it—pull on an X-Men sweatshirt and scarf Cheetos? Or is it just a symbol of how phony he felt, how humiliated?

For a journalist, reading such accounts is like ethical porn: It turns you on and leaves you feeling like a sucker. Throughout the book, Glass anticipates our objections as we make them, putting them in the mouths of those he betrayed. "You've poured poison into the stream," Underwood lectures. "Readers, who are already increasingly cynical, will lump magazines together. Because of Stephen Glass' lies, they'll say, you can't believe journalists as a class." His friend Brian calls him up to end their friendship and accuses him of being a creepy manipulator: "You have an uncanny ability to tap in to people's deep psychological needs and satisfy them. You did it in your stories, and I think you did it in your friendships too."

But these explanations are the rhetorical equivalent of a salesman cutting you off with a finger to the lips: "I know what you're going to say." Because this is a novel, Glass can sketch nasty portraits of those close to him, all the while explaining how sorry he is that he wronged them. In real life Glass went to law school and to therapy; in the book he flees into an anonymous job at a video store—heightening the pathos and neatly eliding his real-life privilege. And when Glass delivers the money shot toward the end of the book, revealing what he's learned from this *schadenfreudian* analysis, it's equally maddening. Everyone has gotten him wrong, he insists. He's no evil genius. He didn't want grubby money, or icky fame. Instead, he was merely immature, needy, love-starved, imaginative—and, OK, jealous. "They had actually done what I'd only aspired to do, and at some subconscious level, I must have wanted to bring them down, to prove they and I weren't so different after all. But of course we were. They were the real thing; I was an imitation."

The strongest parts of the book are when Glass comes clean, or at least cleaner, about his own manipulations. Because if he continually insists that he's no monster, just a man who wanted love, the book seems fueled by the rage that underlies many a mutual dependency. In Glass's case, that primal scene was between writer and editor—a relationship that both parties must pretend is an egalitarian love affair, a mutual collaboration toward the perfect final draft. In real life, it's a bit more sado-masochistic. For editors, writers are babies who need to be handled. They're thin-skinned and grandiose, they procrastinate and need endless reassurance. And they don't understand the big picture.

But all writers have a little Stephen Glass in them. We may not be liars, but we're eager to please—and often filled with resentment. We're submissives; it's part of the job. It's part of all jobs, really, but in journalism, it's the task of editors to push for what they can't get: a better quote, a normal detail. It's normal for editors to bring their own thesis to the table: My editor on this piece suggested I write about the way that big journalism's overemphasis on the perfect narrative creates Stephen Glasses. I didn't entirely agree, so that's not quite what I wrote.

But I also knew my editor had a point about that professional undertow, that craving for a story that's too good to be true. All journalists mold reality into an idealized shape, and even writers with integrity can feel like beggars, scrambling for what editors sometimes refer to as the perfect casting—the photographable subject, the quote that supercharges the lead. When that casting isn't there, it's lethal. The story may die—or rather, to use the journalistic term, be "killed."

It's the writer's job to love something more than the perfect story: to want to tell the truth so badly that he won't lie even when an editor begs—explicitly or implicitly—for just that. Good editors rely on that love.

Stephen Glass loved himself more. And when Glass admits this sneaky coldness, this thrill at shifting the blame, he is perversely at his most likable. You can't help but believe him. After he's been caught,

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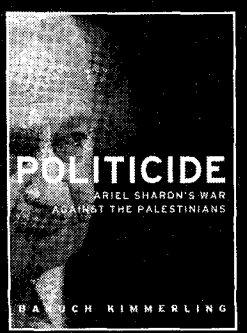

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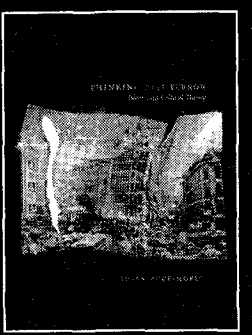

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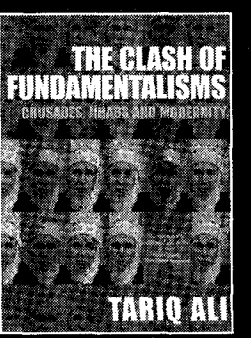

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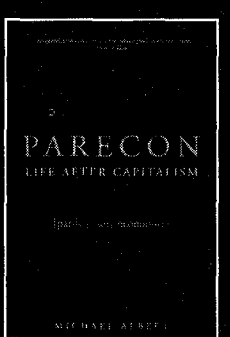

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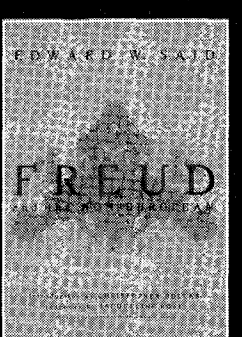

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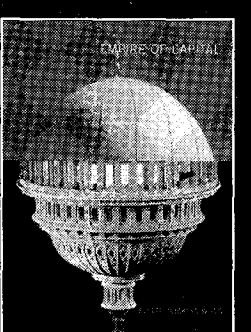

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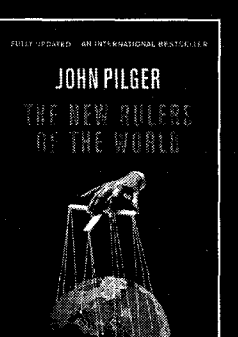

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when he and Underwood are riding the elevator up to the *Weekly* offices, they stand silently. His editor fumes as the floors bing by. And what is Glass thinking? "Silently I begged Robert to hit me. Four. *Bing*. Please punch me, Robert. Five *Bing*. I pushed my chin out farther to make an easier target. Take out your anger on my body, I thought. Do what men do, Robert. Yes, you have a family that depends on you. Hit me. I deserve it. Break my nose. Scar me."

It seems like more of the same masochistic mea culpa until the next paragraph arrives. "If you hit me, people will see how horrible you are. No matter what I've done, it will be excused when compared to your violence.... Tomorrow, the headline will read: 'EDITOR ASSAULTS WRITER CAUGHT FABRICATING.' Maybe, if I'm really lucky, the last part will even be reduced to a subhead."

At moments like this, I, clutching my reviewer's copy, totally got my money's worth. ■

Among the Believers

VINCE PASSARO

THE LIFE YOU SAVE MAY BE YOUR OWN: An American Pilgrimage.
By Paul Elie. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 554 pp. $27.

Paul Elie's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* is a deft and ambitious four-part biography interweaving the lives of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Walker Percy and Flannery O'Connor, the most significant American Catholic writers of the last century. The selection of these four might feel to some arbitrary or forced—would all the Catholic writers go to this side of the room, please?—but that would be a misimpression.

As individuals, they were admiring of each other, they corresponded and in some cases met, but they were not close friends or from the same backgrounds or milieus. Day was a social activist, a journalist and occasional fiction writer, little read now but still influential as a political and religious presence. O'Connor, author of two novels and two unforgettable story collections before she died at age 39 of lupus, had no social or political influence at all, but her fiction and her letters seem to grow in stature continually as time goes on. Merton was a poet, philosopher and monk, whose autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, was responsible in part for a burgeoning of conversion and monasticism in midcentury America, and whose later writings stirred the ecumenism that suffused the Vatican II period and that helped introduce Eastern thought into modern Christian theology. Percy started as a philosopher and became an influential novelist, particularly of the realistic novel featuring the existential suburban male.

These were very different careers, but binding the group and providing it with historical weight are two crucial facts: three of the four were converts to Catholicism, and none of them were writers who merely happened to be Catholic, or who merely were influenced by their Catholicism; all of them wrote specifically because they were Catholics. Take away their Catholicism, and as writers they would cease to exist, at least in any form recognizable to those who have known their work and been influenced by it.

Catholicism bound them in part because they discovered in each other's faith and each other's ultimate fame a set of partners in what had been for each a rather lonesome vocation: writing, which is always something of a lonesome vocation, and trying to explain to a growing public the radically different way of seeing the world, its events and our lives in it that faith suggests and finally requires. In none of their work will readers ever see the suggestion that they ought to be more pious, ought to pray, ought to go to church or light candles to the saints; each writer instead presents us with a dramatic challenge to find the permanent and never immediate meanings behind the mundane incidents of everyday life and behind the massive forces of societies and nations as well. Though their views differed, they shared one social and political conviction. For Day, for O'Connor, for Percy and for Merton, the momentary cruelty or defensiveness that prevents us from helping a person in need, and the sustained cruelty or defensiveness that leads us to make war,

Vince Passaro's novel Violence, Nudity, Adult Content *(Simon & Schuster) was recently published in paperback. His criticism has appeared in* Harper's *and many other magazines.*

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come from the same weakness inside us: our failure sufficiently to love, our fear of love's pain and love's obligations. It is an intensely difficult vision to make compelling to the modern, narcissistic consciousness, and it is difficult as well to make it unsentimental, thereby fulfilling the obligations of art and truth. Like four craftsmen they shared this project with each other.

For his part, Paul Elie, an editor at Farrar, Straus & Giroux and an essayist, has taken on and smoothly delivered a massive project for his first book: These are, after all, four biographies in one. The subtitle of *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* (the title is Flannery O'Connor's, from one of her very best stories) is "An American Pilgrimage," but these were four separate pilgrimages, definitely American, yes, but historically distinct and intellectually hyperactive: When Percy reads Kierkegaard and a host of other modern philosophers, Elie does too; when O'Connor is deep into the letters of Baron Friedrich von Hügel or the philosophy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Elie has to go along. Merton's knowledge of Buddhism must be approximated to be written about; so too Day's immersion in the local and international politics of the 1930s and later. Unlike them, Elie had to familiarize himself with their interests and their contexts in a limited time, and unlike all but Day, he had an actual job to attend to. Yet he is always reliable, often insightful and occasionally inspired. Here he is on Hazel Motes, the Oedipally self-blinded hero of O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*:

> Hazel Motes is not a prophet or a saint or a wise man or even a religious believer—not yet. He is a person walking in darkness, a blind man stabbing the ground with his cane. Walking in darkness *is* his religious experience, not merely the context for it.... Faith (in the catechetical formulation of the period) is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, and Motes's blindness, at best, is a recognition that the proof of Jesus' divinity that he yearns for cannot be seen with the eyes only, and that nothing he might see, no miracle or act of blasphemy, can tell him whether or not to believe.

There is something Edmund Wilson–like about what Elie has accomplished: No one these days can really match Wilson's magnificent prose or his focused intellectual firepower, but Elie comes close, writes with superb and easygoing clarity, and brings to the book a sense of that extraordinary breadth and intellectual openness that made Wilson an invaluable figure in American letters.

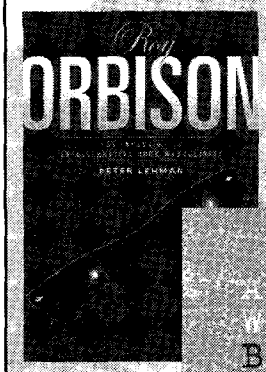
Clearly, too, Elie is sympathetic to the religious beliefs of his four subjects; the question remains, by the time you get to the end of his book, whether he has accomplished what Day, Merton, Percy and O'Connor so remarkably accomplished, which is to make their faith somehow appealing and important to modern nonbelievers. The times are not as propitious as they were a half-century ago. As a culture, we have moved from an open despair at the spiritual emptiness of modern life to a Bruegel-like celebration of it. Tangible yearnings have become intangible, and so it is not clear that if you are not already captured and interested by these writers, this book will speak to you in the deep ways it speaks to those of us who are. Ultimately this is not Elie's problem to solve: He neither apologizes for nor pauses to justify the religious faith of his subjects. He examines it, with deep sympathy, and assumes the reader will be open to doing the same.

Dorothy Day was born in 1897, Merton in 1915, Percy a year later, and O'Connor, finally, in 1925. O'Connor was the only hereditary Catholic in the group; the others were, by distinct pathways, swept along in the movement that made midcentury Catholicism so attractive to intellectuals, first in Europe and later, perhaps even more forcefully, in the United States. Converts in Europe included T.S. Eliot (not technically to the Roman Church but very close to it, in an Anglican-Roman movement called Anglo-Catholicism), Auden, Waugh and Graham Greene, among many others. In the United States, in addition to Day, Merton and Percy, there were the poets Allen Tate and Robert Lowell (for whom revelation became a form of madness), and their wives, the writers Caroline Gordon and Jean Stafford.

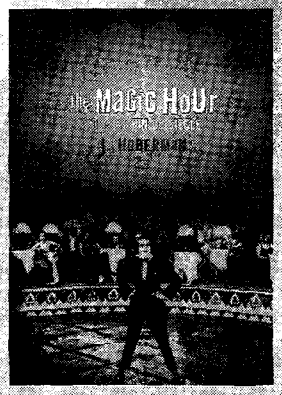
To everyone who looks upon formal Christianity with cultural suspicion, the Catholic form of orthodoxy appears particularly pedestrian, rule-bound, proletarian in the least attractive senses of that word, hostile to free inquiry, locked in a tradition it forever declares immutable (which traditions never are, in fact), and, most offensive to the modern consciousness, sexually hysterical and misogynistic. These recognitions and deep cultural assumptions about Christianity, for the intellectually active and sensitive Catholic, are troubling and difficult to argue with. Yet for the believer, beyond these worldly failures stands God: author of beauty.

To the artists and intellectuals of the

Spring Reading FROM TEMPLE



Andy Warhol's Blow Job



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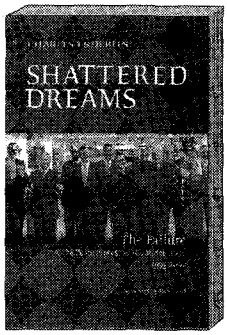

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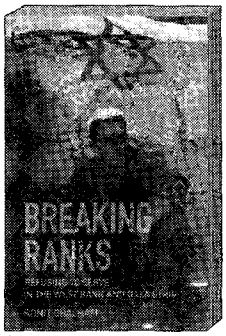

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early and middle twentieth century, the Church offered a specific framework for that beauty, a framework for seeing existence that is magnificent in its completeness; gorgeous in its visual, musical and written expressions; historical in its culture and identity; and tangibly human in its vision of politics ("repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God")—perhaps the only intellectually respectable philosophical escape then available from the spiritually vacant and personally grueling dynamics of state capitalism and state socialism. The problems of modernity are the psychological stresses arising from a new knowledge of history, an unwilling acceptance of industrialization and a forced recognition of meaninglessness. Faith, of the orthodox, Roman variety, "solves" all three.

Religious belief, separate from the specifically Catholic, also proves to be personally invigorating. In a culture in which the measure of life's purpose is the acquisition of property and consumer goods (defined as desirable by mass taste), the artist is particularly vulnerable by force of his commercial uselessness. We see all around us today the cultural effects of artists having psychologically and aesthetically internalized that sense of uselessness, most uniformly expressed in a feebleness of ambition or endlessly disguised commercialism. At best, artists in this country at this time can make a childlike appeal to be allowed (c'mon, just once?) to sit with the grown-ups, having forgotten that not so long ago artists *were* the grown-ups. Religious belief at least allows the comfort of understanding one's exclusion to be somewhat monastic in character, rather than possibly futile and definitely hard on the pocketbook and the rest of the family. These are a few practical reasons for faith of a specifically Roman Catholic kind: They are ground softeners, as it were. However, Elie's book makes clear that for Day, Merton, Percy and O'Connor, faith was not utilitarian in these obvious ways; it was born, carried, nurtured and endured like an internal flame.

The least read but the most mythologically potent of the four is Day. She became a myth in her own time, long before her death, emerging into public life after being an unwed mother and bohemian aesthete (with a scandalous novel of abortion under her belt) who converted to Catholicism, gave up her wordly goods and opened a soup kitchen and flophouse for the poor on the Lower East Side of New York City. The flophouse grew into a significant movement—The Catholic Workers—with other kitchens and other flophouses in other places, communal farms and a newspaper (the *Catholic Worker*) where Day had a regular column that would become, despite her several books, her major and most influential writing, on issues of poverty, war and peace, nonviolence, the civil rights movement and much more. Day is the sole figure here who is being investigated for possible beatification, the first formal step toward canonization as a saint. She is the only one of them who ought to be so examined, for her work, serving the poor and preaching the gospel as she saw it, has about it the physical reality and presence in the world of facts that sainthood actually requires.

Merton, born in Europe, raised in France and New York (Douglaston, Queens, to be exact) and educated at Cambridge and Columbia, converted to Catholicism in his early 20s, was ultimately ordained a priest and entered the Trappist monastery at Gethsemani in Kentucky. His autobiography of his wild and youthful wanderings, his ultimate conversion and his journey into

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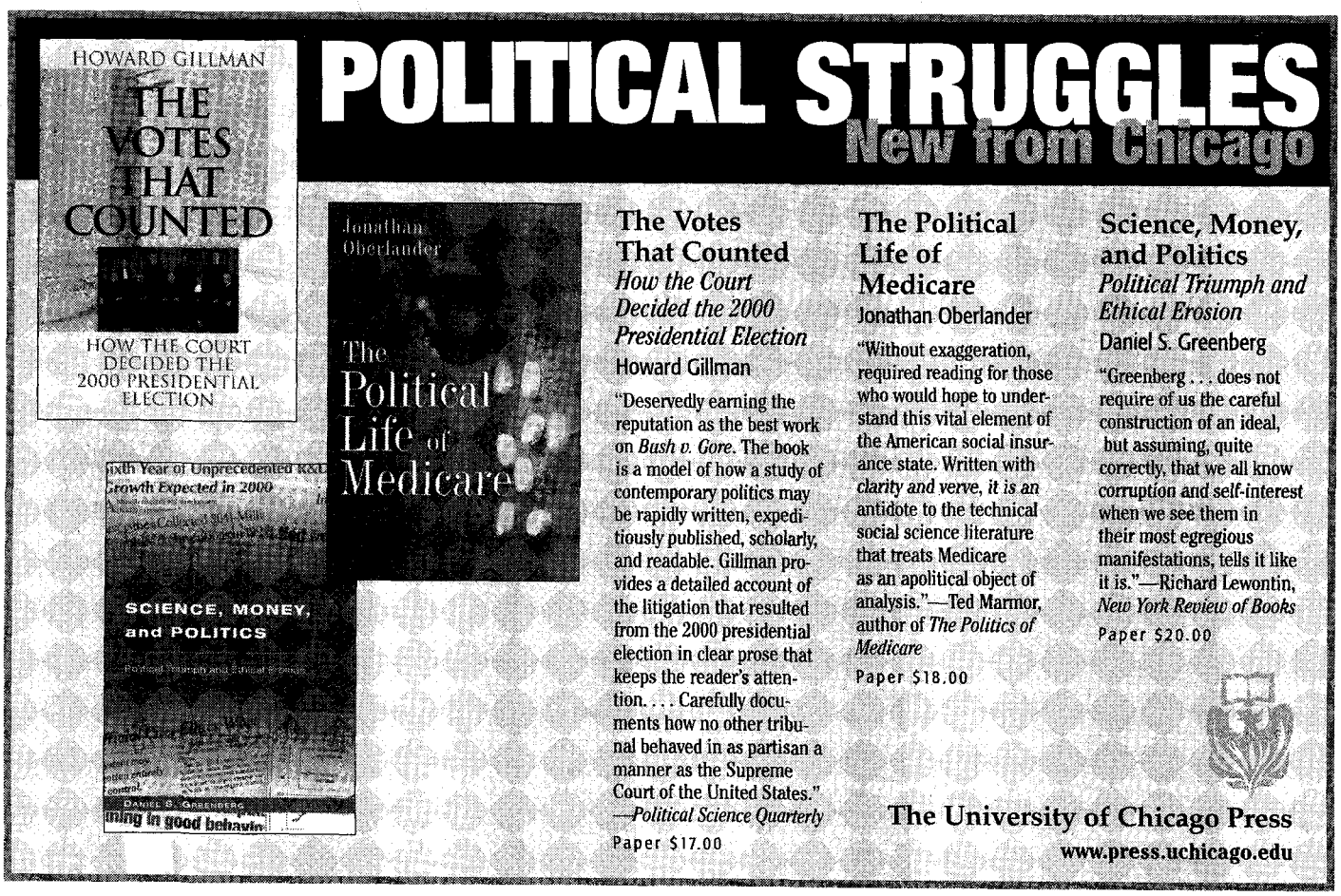
monasticism, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, was published in 1948 and became an international bestseller. He was only 33 years old; he would spend the next thirty years in monastic life, writing journals, poems, prayers, contemplations and studies of various religious themes. His writing and his political beliefs (antiwar when the Church hierarchy was adamantly and bizarrely not) drew him into greater and greater realms of controversy before he died during a trip to Asia in 1968. (He slipped getting out of the bath, apparently grabbed onto a fan and was electrocuted. Elie gives no credence to the rumors of this being a suicide, and rightly, I think, for there is no evidence whatsoever in his journals or correspondence at the time of his being in any significant despair, other than at the state of the world.)

Percy was born to Southern gentility and after his parents died, he was raised by an uncle, Will Percy, a wealthy man and also a writer of essays and memoirs. Percy went north in the late 1940s to study medicine at Columbia, got TB from the clinical work he did and converted during his recuperation. He wrote several failed novels and a number of philosophical essays through the 1950s before he published *The Moviegoer* (1961), a novel of a lost suburban man, as so many of his later novels would be, which won the National Book Award and established him in his mid-40s as a major American novelist.

O'Connor, for my taste, is the great artist of the group, with a purity and intensity of ambition that is utterly idiosyncratic and unaccountable. She was from a landed but not very lofty Georgia Catholic family, educated at a local "women's college," as they were then drearily called, recognized by the early director of the Iowa Writer's Workshop as a talent, admitted there and, despite cultural inferiority and a rudimentary sense of aesthetics, grew ever more tenacious in pursuit of her own vision. She taught herself not only to write but how to be a great writer, step by painful step, as she would have to teach herself how to get about on crutches in her 30s, after the treatments for her lupus softened her bones. Her Catholicism was fierce and consuming, and it was the sole motivation for her work, for its look and sound and thematic expression, and she has been enormously influential on Catholic writers who have followed. It's an influence that has not diminished the appeal she still holds for other, less religiously inclined readers, who recognize in her a startling drama and a Gothic, compelling vision.

Elie brings these writers together in history, as it were: places them in their locales as if on a map, and with almost invisible effort shows us the massive cultural and historical forces at work around them, the events and forces that affected them and that were affected by them. He is comfortable in ways many modern writers would not be with the specific language of their piety (he eloquently captures the appeal of the monastery, for instance, as "a place of retreat, where the world was left behind so that God might be glimpsed") and, but for one case, comfortable too with the paradoxical evidence of their holiness and their human foibles.

The exception is a brief passage where he takes O'Connor to task for the evident racism of her everyday speech and some of her correspondence. It is an odd slip in the book, a slightly sanctimonious disapproval that asks her to put aside an essential part of her sensibility, her withering irony and comic vision (from which she never for a moment protected herself or anyone else in her purview, regardless of color), in order to protect a special class of people, African-Americans, based on a historical con-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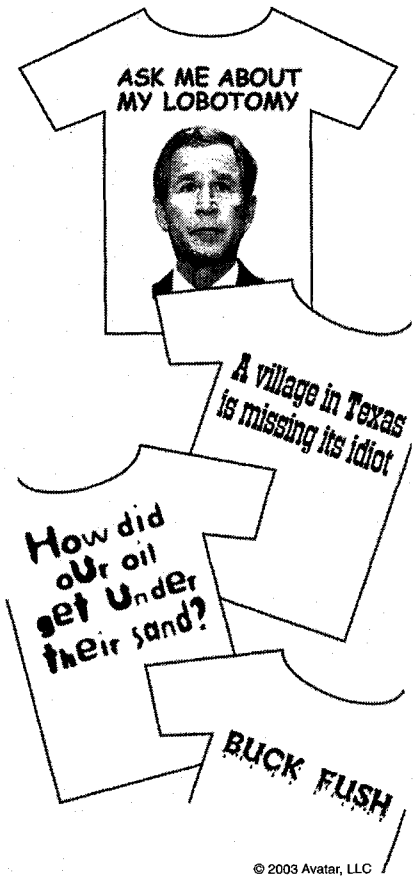

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ception of their status that she didn't live to see. (Not that, had she lived to see it, she would have changed her ways all that much—as tragic as her early death was, it is not at all clear how she would have managed to grow as an artist and even less clear that she would have been a tolerable elder stateswoman.) Elie admits that her racism is not present in her work. Hilton Als made that case even more convincingly in a brilliant essay about O'Connor's putative racism published in *The New Yorker* two years ago. Her fiction demonstrated an understanding that was nuanced and realistic to late 1950s, early 1960s conditions in the South, and at the same time was suffused with a profound moral understanding of suffering, oppression and the elaborately ironic manners that Southern blacks developed as strategies for their social and sometimes even physical survival.

For the rest—Day's early moral struggles, later bursts of temper and frequent and sometimes ill-placed fervor, for Percy's disengagement and frequent depression, for Merton's early sex life and later, odd affair with a young woman when he was a 51-year-old Trappist monk—Elie shows an informed sympathy and understanding, and the necessary, large sense that life is complicated and everyone makes mistakes. He is, blessedly, not subject to the biographer's disease, a creeping hatred of and contempt for his subjects.

What has been for many readers, including me, so potent about these writers, has been the force, driven into a masterful language, of their conviction that our recognition of the truth of the universe, of its unimaginable creation and invisible purposes, really is a matter of the greatest possible importance, of life and death: an eternal concern tied to the notion of salvation. Two of them, Day and to a lesser degree Merton, were able to balance that spiritual view with ongoing interest and considerable involvement in worldly affairs, in movements and actions for justice and for peace. Percy and O'Connor shaped an art from their belief and, socially speaking, let it stand for itself. Elie, in his borrowed title and in his descriptions of various critical moments in these four lives, indicates his concurrence with that large and life-changing view, though he has not shown an arrogance akin to theirs and tried to make the case himself. Thus for the Catholic intellectual, he is a gentle, perhaps too-polite guide, but an essential one, back to the sources of an irreplaceable inspiration. ■

Que Viva Mexico!

SARAH KERR

SURVIVORS IN MEXICO.
By Rebecca West. Edited by Bernard Schweizer. Yale. 264 pp. $26.95.

For years it was one of those intriguing asterisk marks in many a great writer's career—a book that might have been but wasn't. In 1966, at the age of 74 and not long after finishing work on her fifth novel, Dame Rebecca West left her country house in Buckinghamshire and traveled to Mexico City on assignment for *The New Yorker*. She was on the trail of Leon Trotsky, who had spent his last few years in incongruously picturesque exile there, amid cacti and fragrant flowers, devotedly raising rabbits, until an assassin took an ice pick to his head in 1940. West planned to interview Trotsky's grandson, Seva, who still owned the revolutionary's failed safehouse. (In 1990, he reopened the house as a melancholy museum.) But soon into the writing of the *New Yorker* piece she felt called to undertake a much bigger project: a sweeping book on Mexico itself, which had inspired her beyond expectation.

The book would be a feat of imagination. Not that West would make things up; rather, she would try to intuit patterns in Mexico's fraught history and then weave those patterns into the history of all civilizations. She would revisit the story of the conquest, evoking the gentle yet brutal Aztecs and the clever treachery of Hernán Cortés. She would pay tribute to modern Mexicans, whom she admired for their ingenuity in dealing with everything from racial divisions to traffic from hell. Ever idiosyncratic, West even figured she could shine light on Mexico by way of her own family tree. When her father was young he had been tutored by a French anarchist. As it happened, the tutor ran in the same circle as an enigmatic Mexican intellectual of the early twentieth century. This strange genius, with the unforgettable name of Dr.

Sarah Kerr is the film critic for Vogue.

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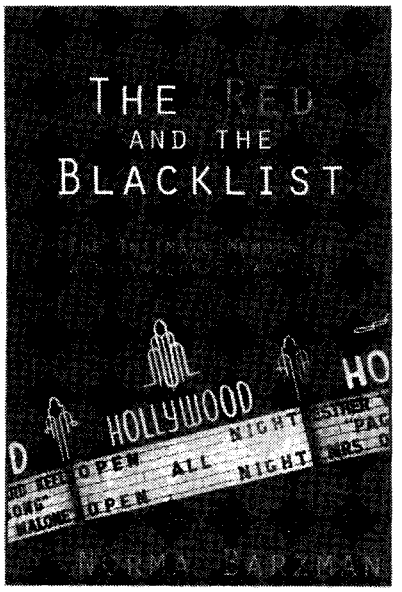

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Atl, helped launch the muralist movement that eventually produced Diego Rivera, and taught Mexico's artists to study and respect their pre-Colombian roots.

The book West planned had the chance to be a kind of sequel to her masterpiece of the Balkans, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. That was the grand hope, anyway. For a while, she made serious progress, revising certain sections as many as ten times, leaving others in early draft form or simply incomplete. And then, because her husband of nearly four decades died during the writing, or simply because she was in her mid-70s and a realist, she quit. After reading an enthusiastic description of the manuscript in Carl Rollyson's biography of West, Bernard Schweizer, an assistant professor of English at Long Island University, got an idea. Why not weave together the scraps West left behind? In his introduction, Schweizer describes how he sorted through her Mexico papers at the University of Tulsa, recording every topic she so much as mentioned on a poster board to see exactly where the fragments overlapped. Rather alarmingly, he compares his process to "assembling a jigsaw puzzle." But compared with other recent posthumous releases (of some of Hemingway's mediocre, depressive late works, for example), Schweizer's project does not seem like a terrible violation. There are no real skeletons in this closet. The carefully annotated result reads smoothly enough for stretches at a time, advancing profound (if often bizarrely off-topic) arguments as only West could have framed them. Scattered throughout are sentences as vigorous and rhythmically original as any she ever wrote.

It's also true, though, that *Survivors in Mexico* is guided by an overconfidence that today we might call hubris. If any other writer had begun and abandoned a book in the late 1960s, we would examine it for signs of the tumultuous times. What did West think of the rift between generations? Of the new fashion for Third World intellectuals? West never cared for this kind of current-events commentary. She was a generalist of the old school, offering a service to the culture that has since been split up and delegated to narrower minds. Travel writer, historian, pundit, theologian, political scientist, keeper of a personal journal: She could write in any of these modes, but only on her own terms.

For better and worse, *Survivors in Mexico* puts West's method under the microscope. Early chapters, which one senses she didn't get to work over thoroughly, are mostly travelogue. She is astonished by the vast spectacle of Mexico City, bordered by twin volcanoes, its skies mellowed by pollution to "a honey-coloured vagueness, a primrose glow, an amber fire." In passages that might rankle the PC police but mean no harm, she admires the slender physique of Mexicans. She slightly overstates the influence of Diego Rivera, but she is two decades ahead of her time in shrewdly grasping the "Ophelianish" appeal of Frida Kahlo, whose international cult had yet to blossom. She contrasts Mexican nationalism with its European counterparts. When a taxi driver recounts centuries-old abuses by Spaniards during the Inquisition, she remarks that "the

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man is not denouncing some monstrous invader of his people's lands, as Poles might denounce the Nazi Germans; he is denouncing some of his ancestors for maltreating other of his ancestors, which, as he is both, must lead to schizophrenia."

All this is interesting enough, if pretty standard intro-to-Mexico stuff. Still, there is a striking lack of intimacy in these early observations. West is curious, and her eye keenly registers visual details. But it is not clear that she has come to know any Mexican particularly well, or even talked to anyone at great length. Instead, we sense her isolation. Rather like an auteur film director late in his career, she imposes on Mexico themes that she had famously pursued for decades. She had long been a fascinated student of big state bureaucracies, for instance. In a sketchy analysis one wishes she could have filled in, she notes the paternalism of Mexico's ruling party, cloaked in an appealing rhetoric of "social justice." West is off-target in her immediate analysis of how well Mexico's government was satisfying the needs of the people, failing to see signs of conflict that would soon culminate in the 1968 massacre of students at Tlatelolco. But in the long term, she is prescient: Despite unrest, few

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Mexicans could even imagine an alternative to the Institutional Revolutionary Party until they saw the government bungle the 1985 earthquake, when more than 10,000 Mexico City residents perished. As West had predicted, the people finally would not stand for callousness and incompetence on this large a scale.

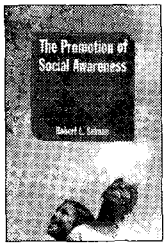
Another of West's great themes, in both her writing and her private life, was theatricality. She had always viewed history as an unfolding drama, composed of an infinite number of scenes. The dramatic tension came from a perennial quandary: Even after all this time, human beings have no idea why we were put here on earth. Frustrated and terribly curious, we make efforts to understand. This is how we end up with science and religion and (West's chosen remedy for ignorance) art. But even with these disciplines to help us, we jump to faulty conclusions—we explain ourselves badly, and don't listen well to others. Given her view of history as a series of communication failures, there has rarely been a subject more promisingly matched to a writer than the fateful encounter of Spaniard and Aztec is to Rebecca West. The middle, historical sections of *Survivors in Mexico* sparkle with casual brilliance. I have no doubt that in her eagerness to paint a vivid picture, West is, shall we say, "creative" with a few facts. But if other writers have dryly explained that the Aztecs followed three distinct calendars, West makes us feel the metaphysical panic ("if a man wanted to settle a day for his daughter's wedding, he had to consider the four magical significances of the day, and these would be considered in connection with the eight magical significances of the bride and the groom") and the absurdist humor ("The situation recalls the harassment of our own Western world by our complicated tax structures"). Her description of Montezuma and Cortés meeting face to face calls to mind a tragic Verdi duet as staged by Preston Sturges. And here she is, wry and modern-sounding, on the economics of conquest:

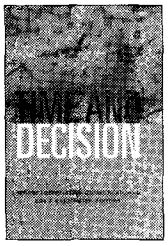
> The theory of the European invaders of the New World (insofar as they had a theory) was that they were conferring benefits on the native populations by inviting them to participate in international trade, and there they might have claimed to be genuine economic benefactors. But unfortunately they also felt compelled to confiscate both the accumulated wealth of the native populations and their natural resources, so far as these were mineral. This is not altogether the plain peculation that it appears, for they had an ingenuous belief that, as the native populations had no monetary system, these were wasted on them, and they were doing the only sensible thing if they took the minerals away and put them to useful purposes. It has to be remarked that these predators were actually conferring a huge benefit on another part of the Old World, by relieving its currency famine. This is not a moral universe.

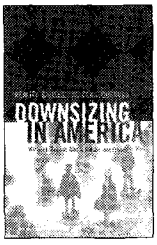
Such passages inevitably make one wonder how West would view America's recent adventure in Iraq, with oil at stake instead of minerals. It's a tough call. From her days in Yugoslavia, she still nursed a suspicion of the Turks that extended at times to Islam itself. But she would have deplored the Bush Administration's reckless duplicity in mounting its case.

At any rate, if these middle sections stand tallest, like the tip of a pyramid, subsequent ones quickly climb back down to earth. West's riff on the link between her father and the mysterious Dr. Atl is interesting enough as Westiana, but tangential as far as Mexican history goes. Sentence by sentence her prose still tracks, but structurally we start to miss her revisions. The text drifts, then abruptly stops. Schweizer

SOCIAL SCIENCE THAT MATTERS







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has kept West's working title, which links her interest in the stoic perseverance of Mexico's natives with her own advancing age. The book itself stands as a kind of ruin—a lovely, kooky, half-finished monument in a cultural style that was already close to extinction. There are many reasons to welcome the abandonment of this style. An English-speaking writer venturing to Mexico today would be required to read Spanish-language sources as well as the lively but dated old English translations West relied on. And a writer following West's quixotic method of—what to call it, historical telepathy?—might seem more than a little mad.

But before we dismiss West as impossibly old-fashioned, consider this: According to her age, she should be classed with English writers like D.H. Lawrence or Graham Greene, who went hunting for material in Mexico and found a refuge from European neurosis or a spellbinding nightmare. But she doesn't belong with them. If she is sometimes presumptuously wrong, she is not condescending. There is no opaque "Other" in her writing. On the contrary: West took it as her duty to make cultures intelligible to each other, by way of the imagination. All of us are forced to construct meaning where there is none, she believed; all of us are in this mess together. She grieved. Then she resolved to keep going out in the world, armed with curiosity and egalitarian respect. You could do a lot worse. ■

When Poetry Was the Rage

JOHN PALATTELLA

ALL POETS WELCOME: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s.
By Daniel Kane. California. 306 pp. Paper $27.50.

DIGRESSIONS ON SOME POEMS BY FRANK O'HARA: A Memoir.
By Joe LeSueur. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 305 pp. $25.

"That was a benefit shooting." So said a shaken Kenneth Koch to a stunned audience seconds after a tall, scraggly man fired a pistol at him on January 10, 1968. Koch was reading at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church, the ad hoc headquarters of a new generation of witty urban poets, some of whom, like Ted Berrigan and Ron Padgett, were influenced by the poetry of Koch and his chums John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara. As Koch delivered the opening lines of "To My Audience"—"My audience of camel dung and fig newtons,/ My audience of hats, and how shall I address my audience/of new york green frock bats"—a poet named Allen Van Newkirk approached the front of the stage and yelled "Stop!" Van Newkirk then pulled out a pistol and took two shots at Koch. Koch lurched forward, thinking he was wounded. But Koch had not been wounded, let alone shot, because Van Newkirk's pistol was loaded with blanks. As Koch collected himself Van Newkirk traded insults with several audience members, and in the back of the church an accomplice, Andrei Codrescu, distributed leaflets protesting the suspicious conviction of LeRoi Jones for illegal possession of firearms. Koch, apparently, was not the only poet who had been "assassinated."

This faux-assassination occurred in the early years of the Poetry Project, and it is fitting to find the episode described in *All Poets Welcome*, Daniel Kane's history of the vibrant poetry scene that exploded on New York City's Lower East Side during the 1960s. In a way, the episode is an apt symbol for Kane's book. Kane presents the faux-assassination as an example of the audience collaboration that made Poetry Project readings raucous and invaluable. But wasn't the faux-assassination just radical chic, and a fairly smug dose at that? Koch seems to have thought as much, since the poem he read immediately after his surrealist assassins had fled was "The Pleasures of Peace," in which he writes, "Now I must devote my days to the Pleasures of Peace/to my contemporaries I'll leave the horrors of war/they can do them better than I." Elsewhere Kane claims that "the personal behavior and social formations exhibited at poetry readings, cafes, and bars" on the Lower East Side "played a role in determining future reception of a given text." In other words, it's indispensable to explain how the advice and gossip that poets traded over coffee and between the sheets invariably directed attention to this or that poem. Time and again in *All Poets Welcome*, a description of some interesting aspect of the Lower East Side poetry scene is assaulted by academic hyperbole, and all too often Kane's argument ends up shooting blanks.

This is unfortunate because Kane has an important story to tell: how, beginning in the early 1960s, a second generation of New York School poets defined itself through a unique culture of publicly performed poetry and cheap publications. In her lively memoir, the poet Hettie Jones (LeRoi Jones's first wife) remembers that in the early 1960s a real estate broker named D.D. Stein advertised his $25 cold-water flats on Avenue B with the slogan "Join the Smart Trend," and the cafe Les Deux Mégots on East Seventh Street publicized itself with the motto "Come East Young Man." Lured by the neighborhood's cheap rents and bohemian aura, poets like Padgett and Berrigan came to the Lower East Side from as far west as Tulsa, Oklahoma, whereas others, such as Anne Waldman, migrated several blocks, from Greenwich Village. The poets hung out at Les Deux Mégots and Le Metro, both of which held open poetry readings.

Although open readings are as widespread today as Barnes & Noble, in the early 1960s they were novel. John Ashbery has said that when he left New York City for Paris in 1958, "poetry readings were solemn and official events given by the elder statesmen of poetry." When Ashbery returned to New York five years later, "everyone was giving poetry readings everywhere. I was astonished at being asked to give one, until I realized I was one of about a hundred poets one could have heard that night in New York." At Les Deux Mégots, any poet could read for a set number of minutes, and anyone in the audience could praise or belittle the work. Kane's book includes a thirty-four-track CD featuring recordings of poets reading their work, and some of the recordings, notably Koch's memorable reading of "To My Audience," include catcalls from the audience.

Little magazines quickly emerged from this scene. *Poets at Les Deux Mégots* and *Poets at Le Metro* were literal records of the poems read at both cafes, whereas *The Floating Bear*, edited by LeRoi Jones and Diane Di Prima, and *C: A Journal of Poetry*, edited by Berrigan, published new poems by poets prominent on the cafe circuit. These little magazines were different from the typical literary monthly or quarterly. Most were produced on hand-

John Palattella writes frequently on poetry for The Nation, *the* Los Angeles Times *and other publications.*

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cranked mimeograph machines, a cheap technology that allowed editors to print publications as frequently or irregularly as they liked, a liberty that in turn modified the publications' purposes. Charles Olson was fond of the semimonthly *The Floating Bear* because his new poems could be in the hands of a few hundred readers and writers in two or three weeks. For Paul Blackburn, another advantage of mimeoed little magazines was that they functioned like newsletters. The stapled, smudged pages had a raw, homemade feeling, and along with poems and reviews they featured "recommendations as to what books are on sale at what shops, what new magazines (or newsletters) have started up and their addresses, instructions for raising rare herbs."

Kane says that the gossipy tone of these publications is yet another indication of how poets on the Lower East Side did not simply frequent the same dingy bars and restaurants but had managed to form a genuine community, "an 'alternative' literary and social project in opposition to an official conservative verse culture." This is certainly true of the Poetry Project at St. Mark's, which through its reading series and poetry and printing workshops defined an aesthetic and served as a semi-official gateway into the Lower East Side literary milieu.

But Kane overplays his hand when discussing the reading series and little magazines of the Lower East Side, freely using the word "community" when he's clearly talking about a bunch of cliques. *The Floating Bear* was free, but it was sent only to those people included on a tightly controlled mailing list. Similarly, Ed Sanders's *Fuck You/a magazine of the arts* was available just at a small number of stores, hidden behind the counter, and only those in the know could find it. If this is a community, it's one that thrives on a closely cultivated sense of intimacy, secrecy and personality—a coterie, really. Because Kane is so enamored of "community" and its ennobling connotations, he downplays the tension between the winks and nods friends made at each other in their poems and the challenges those friends faced when they moved beyond their cliques. Consequently, an episode that should be a central part of Kane's story—Ted Berrigan's decision in summer 1968 to leave the Lower East Side for the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa—is merely a coda. With his incessant talk about community, Kane is as convincing as a realtor on the Lower East Side who insists that a studio with a closet large enough to accommodate a tiny futon is a spacious one-bedroom apartment.

The king of downtown literary coteries in the early 1960s was Frank O'Hara. An indefatigable talker, drinker and smoker, O'Hara was like the sun of a small solar system, providing heat and light to the writers and painters clustered around him. O'Hara lived on East Ninth Street from 1959 to 1963, and although he hated his apartment (it was infested with cockroaches) and its location (hard on Tompkins Square Park), his tenure on the Lower East Side was, according to his former roommate Joe LeSueur, "the high point in his writing, both in productivity and quality." During this period many young poets fell into orbit around O'Hara—Berrigan, Padgett, Aram Saroyan and David Shapiro, all of whom recognized that O'Hara, despite his connections with the uptown art world, remained an unrecognized and underappreciated poet. O'Hara's intellectual and sexual charisma had caught LeSueur's eye nearly a decade earlier, and it is the story of his ten-year relationship with O'Hara and his immersion in Manhattan's world of poetry and art that LeSueur tells in his relaxed, meandering and tender memoir.

LeSueur grew up in a large Mormon family in Los Angeles and served as an Army medic in Italy during World War II. His friends, he says, compared him to Madame Bovary languishing in the provinces. LeSueur fled his Yonville on a cross-country Greyhound bus that deposited him in New York City in July 1949. After a few weeks of cruising swanky uptown bars and surviving on cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and one-night stands, he became the kept boy of a Reichian therapist. As a concession to indulging in the twenty- and fifty-dollar bills that his lover kept stuffed in a small ivory box, LeSueur sat for twenty minutes in an orgone box three times a week. This wasn't exactly the glamorous writer's life that LeSueur had imagined for himself when he sat in a public library in Los Angeles devouring *The New Yorker* and the Sunday *New York Times*. He finally glimpsed that life in 1951, when he met O'Hara and started hanging out with the poet and his witty friends at uptown galleries and downtown bars. Four years later LeSueur stepped into the middle of a writer's life when he moved into O'Hara's apartment on East 49th Street. "I just came for the weekend and stayed longer than I usually did," he explains. If LeSueur and O'Hara were not quite a couple, they were certainly more than just close friends, with O'Hara always being the household's incandescent center. The two parted ways in 1965, after O'Hara had bedded one of LeSueur's lovers.

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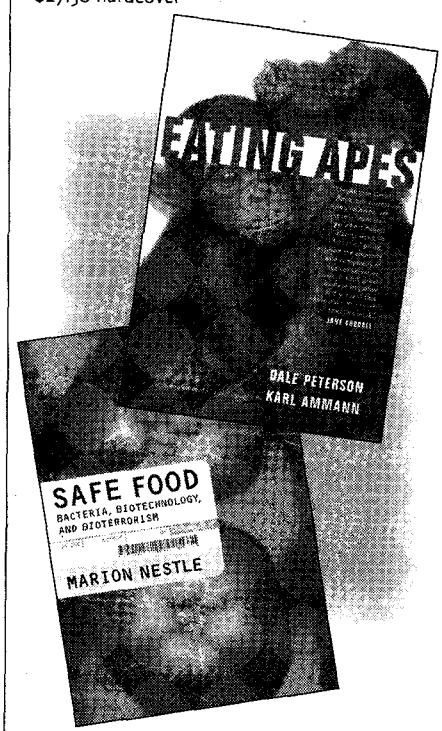

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are indeed digressions, and I make no claim for their value," LeSueur writes in his preface. Beneath this modesty lie a few vendettas. One is against O'Hara's biographer, Brad Gooch, for suggesting in *City Poet* that O'Hara's appetite for rough trade and straight men betrayed his gay identity. LeSueur insists that O'Hara was not always as promiscuous as Gooch says, going so far as to claim that in 1955 O'Hara swore off having sex with strangers. LeSueur also characterizes O'Hara's queerness in a different light: "As for Frank, I'd say that he was pansexual, a term that better suits him inasmuch as it implies a Whitmanesque grandeur, generosity of spirit, and inclusiveness." O'Hara was certainly generous, but he was hardly a saint, and LeSueur knows as much. He tells an anecdote about Charles Ingle, a blond novelist "responsible for burning a hole in Frank's pants." Ingle, who had a mysterious fatal illness, stayed at LeSueur and O'Hara's place for a short period of time in the mid-1950s, and according to LeSueur, "Frank soon became bored seeing him lying around the apartment. 'If Chuck's going to die,' he said after less than a week, 'why doesn't he? What's he waiting for?'" Chuck is no Lana Turner: Chuck Ingle we don't love you get lost.

One thing that O'Hara never tired of was mythologizing his social life, and the names of friends, places and events that spill from his chatty poems are an alluring invitation to biographers. The names are like a secret code, and one can't but wonder if identifying them would unveil the subtext of a poem. But O'Hara's catalogues, though personal, are not confessional, so it doesn't really matter whether or not we know that Mike Kanemitsu, who is mentioned in "Personal Poem," was friends with Jackson Pollock. LeSueur divulges this fact in his chapter on "Personal Poem," but in the course of a digression about O'Hara's attitude toward the Beats and rumors concerning Kanemitsu's life. Those in the market for a concordance to the poems of Frank O'Hara will be disappointed by the way LeSueur alludes to Kanemitsu and the many other people who appeared on the crowded stage of O'Hara's life and work. Not only is his book's lack of an index an impediment to swiftly tracking down bits of O'Hariana, but his glosses of poems are idiosyncratic. In fact, "To the Film Industry in Crisis, [November 15, 1955]," the one chapter where LeSueur proceeds through a poem line by line diligently unpacking allusions, is quite dull.

What LeSueur does best is create a mood. In chapter after chapter, with bursts of recollection and flashes of bitchy wit, he not only evokes the noise of O'Hara's quotidian and accidental world but also conveys the extent to which O'Hara's poems were immersed in it. When O'Hara died after being hit by a jeep on Fire Island in 1966, several of his painter friends mourned his passing by creating works that mythologized him as an artist victimized by a brutal society. LeSueur's portrait of O'Hara doesn't suffer from such bombast. With their keen sense of the ephemeral, their dislike of didacticism and their alluring mix of vulnerability and charm, his digressions are fitting tributes to O'Hara's ebullient poems. ■

The Holy Land

MICHAEL KAZIN

HELLFIRE NATION: The Politics of Sin in American History. By James Morone. Yale. 575 pp. $35.

JONATHAN EDWARDS: A Life. By George M. Marsden. Yale. 615 pp. $35.

During the harsh New York City winter of 1909–10, 20,000 garment workers marched and picketed to win recognition of their union. "You are striking against God and Nature, whose law it is that man shall earn his bread in the sweat of his brow," a magistrate hectored one young seamstress. "You are on strike against God." To which George Bernard Shaw responded from across the ocean, "Delightful. Medieval America always in intimate personal confidence of the Almighty."

There is nothing simple about sin, particularly in a land where piety has always been a public enterprise. For that justly forgotten judge, every class-conscious sweatshop was a breeding ground for anarchy. Thankfully, few Americans could swallow the image of the Lord as an authoritarian employer; He had, after all, so many other evils to combat.

And so many eager helpers, stirring up righteous trouble from all points on the political map. Consider the bounty of activities Shaw could have mocked in the early years of the past century. Prohibitionist clerics organized to ban "the liquor traffic," sentinels of womanly virtue (from both genders) tried to stamp out prostitution and abortion, and churchgoing segregationists adopted Jim Crow laws to protect the white South against the designs of "savage" blacks. On the left, Christian Socialists cursed capitalism as an evil system that enthroned money-changers and mocked the Sermon on the Mount. When the federal government jailed Eugene Debs for speaking out against World War I, one minister from Ohio hailed the radical leader as the "vicarious victim of Society's sins...his life is a continual crucifixion."

The very diversity of crusaders and the fecundity of their targets suggest that Shaw was a better wit than historian. In the United States, the battle against secular evils was and remains a thoroughly modern adventure. Lacking a unified state church, Americans have felt free to define sin almost any way they wish. At the same time, the evangelical Protestant majority has insisted that iniquity be considered a matter both of private and public behavior.

During the 1740s Jonathan Edwards, the great theologian and preacher, implored his fellow New Englanders to cease their wicked habits and cling tightly to "the God that holds you over the pits of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect...and is dreadfully provoked." But he also fretted that their transgressions were imperiling the future of a Christian commonwealth founded to be a "city upon a hill," yet perpetually at risk from hostile nations without and material corruption within. As George Marsden writes in his learned, lucid biography, Edwards "spent vast amounts of time concerned about both Roman Catholicism and the Indians and their respective and very different places in God's plans." He was also an ascetic who ate as little as possible and resolved "never to lose one moment of time" in "unprofitable" pursuits.

Such dual obsessions—for the fate of oneself and one's society—have seldom been the monopoly of either right or left. Whatever their ideology, most serious activists harbor a taste for moralism *in ex-*

Michael Kazin is co-author (with Maurice Isserman) of America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s *(Oxford). He teaches history at Georgetown University.*

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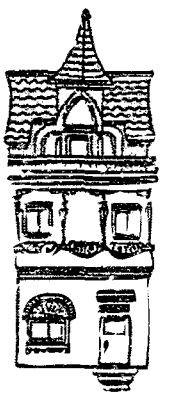

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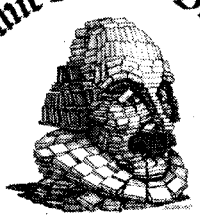

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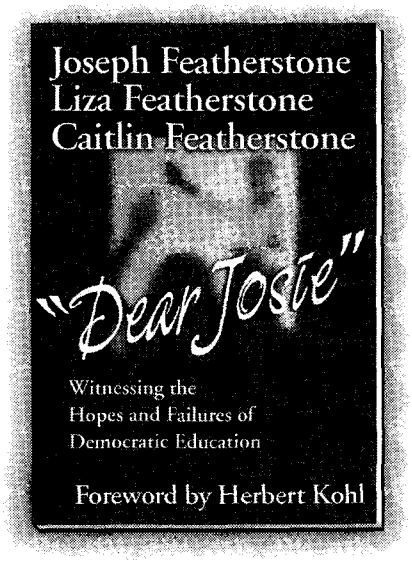

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tremis. No faithful *Nation* reader was surprised that the same right-wing minister who inveighed against "secular humanism" also demanded that Bill Clinton be thrown out of office for committing adultery. But what about the abolitionists who called the Constitution a "covenant from Hell" because it smiled on slavery—and, preaching that "total abstinence from sin" was "necessarily attainable," condemned the hard-drinking habits of Irish immigrants? Indeed, how many contemporary foes of the tobacco lobby can resist giving individual smokers the evil eye?

It takes an audacious scholar both to narrate and try to make sense of this long, tangled history of moralists and their causes. In *Hellfire Nation*, James Morone makes a brave, provocative attempt. He begins with the Puritans' dilemma—how to square the sanctity of hard work with the deviltry of selfish consumption. Then he meanders leisurely through epochal conflicts over slavery, sexual purity and alcohol, and takes briefer glances at the Social Gospel, the Red Scare and the contemporary Christian right.

Morone is a political scientist by trade, but he writes with the zest of a popular historian, alert to the telling detail and the apt quotation. He points out, for example, one reason why, in the early 1870s, the YMCA's Anthony Comstock thought it was urgent to launch a campaign to outlaw contraceptives. The price of a condom had sunk from close to half a dollar in the late 1850s to just 6 cents apiece. Morone adds, "Comstock enthusiastically raided purveyors; he wrote for advice about birth control, then nabbed physicians who mailed him a response. After just two years the Comstock ticker stood at 60,300 rubber articles seized and destroyed."

There's an obvious pitfall awaiting any liberal secularist who tells such stories. A glib condescension can slip into one's prose, leaving the impression that the God-infested zealots shouldn't be taken too seriously. On occasion, Morone gives in to the temptation himself. "People began thumping Bibles again," he cracks about an antebellum revival. But, for the most part, he succeeds in capturing the fears and visions of Christian activists who shared, in Richard Hofstadter's wonderful phrase, the "idea that everyone was in some very serious sense responsible for everything."

As with many a contemporary scholar of American studies, Morone's own moral tale turns primarily on matters of race and gender. The repression of black people, recent immigrants and sexual dissidents lies at the center of his well-crafted narrative. He describes the war between abolitionists and slaveholders to define whether black people were heroic victims or perpetual children. He retells, in throbbing detail, how white prohibitionists used images of swarthy, foreign-born saloonkeepers and gin-guzzling black field hands to install their key demand in the Constitution. And he makes clear that the fear of predatory men and fallen women drove pious activists a century ago to mount a "modern witch-hunt" against brothels, abortionists and any politicians deemed to be lax on vice. As a result, the red-light districts closed down and many prostitutes took to the streets, where their health and livelihood were far less secure than in the bad old days of brazen madams and urban bosses.

Unintended consequences plagued each crusade, and Morone is certainly correct to note that "tribal anxiety" has been endemic in a nation that has always been multicultural, in demography if not conviction. But he's too quick to reduce what he calls "moral panics" to their political meaning. What has motivated crusaders from Jonathan Edwards to Pat Robertson is a desire for personal and collective salvation, not simply social control. Morone says little about how their religious beliefs shaped their worldly activism. Doesn't it matter that Edwards, as a rigorous Calvinist, believed God had already selected which individuals He would save, while Robertson, as a Pentecostal, believes anyone can receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit?

The author also neglects abundant evidence that public piety has repeatedly crossed the color line. Frederick Douglass was a vigorous advocate of temperance, as were most middle-class black churchgoers. And *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is, among other things, an eloquent testament of the power of virtuous living to liberate the minds of oppressed people.

A larger problem is that Morone's view of history is strangely ahistorical. He thinks more about recurring cycles of moralizing politics than about how conflicts about sin have changed the nation over time. "It's the same thing every time," he writes, "Previously excluded people surge forward. Class, race, and gender roles go up for grabs." That's a reflection on the 1960s but could have appeared almost anywhere in the book. For Morone, a panic about sliding morals yields a spate of new regulations that require a new corps of bureaucrats to administer them. The enforcers inevitably overreach themselves and provoke a mass backlash against their authority.

The struggle for prohibition is Morone's classic example: "Exhort people to abstain. Condemn the stubborn drinkers who won't

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listen—usually the latest underclass. Prohibit. Watch the violence escalate, and then see prohibition collapse, leaving behind a political legacy. Pause and repeat." Foes of the liquor traffic, he observes, boosted federal power years in advance of the New Deal and "may have helped fertilize the political culture" for FDR and his allies. Indeed, the Dry Army waged one of the longest and most controversial grassroots campaigns in American history.

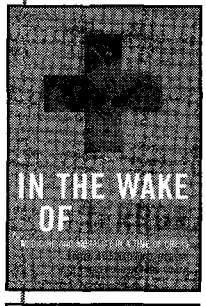
Yet no one seriously thinks about reviving it now. Nor could a latter-day Comstock gain a mass audience or a Congressional majority to enforce his dread of sexual license. Of course, too many drug users still end up in prison, and some abortion providers risk assault or worse. But, through the last half of the twentieth century, American culture gradually but surely grew more tolerant of individual behavior that diverged from the sanctified bourgeois norm.

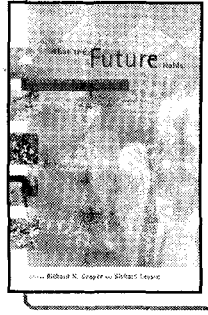
By now, the wheels appear to have fallen off Morone's cycle. Gay men, lesbians, unmarried couples and interracial lovers of all persuasions enjoy a freedom unimaginable fifty years ago. Without sexy talk and seductive images, most television networks would have little to show that makes a profit. Christian conservatives loudly condemn these changes—while most no longer uphold the segregationist views of their ancestors. But they have been powerless to reverse them, and outside their own circle they often look silly for trying.

Unfortunately, adherents of a progressive brand of moralism have even less clout than Jerry Falwell and his brethren. Morone writes that "an undiluted version of the Social Gospel" animated a range of activists in the 1960s, as liberals and radicals of all faiths worked to abolish war and to transform hierarchies of race and gender. But the rhetoric of collective responsibility sounds hollow to many people today, unless it is tethered to a war of self-defense against terrorists. And the born-again Christian who sits in the Oval Office appears to own the franchise on that one. How many Americans are even aware that both the National Council of Churches and Conference of Catholic Bishops took strong stands against a unilateral invasion of Iraq?

For the left, the burden of the past that Morone illuminates is that Social Gospelers have always been on the defensive in a religious culture where individualism reigns. Evangelical Protestants fervently preach that the relationship that counts is a personal one—between the believer and the Almighty—and many a Catholic and adherents of other faiths embrace that credo too, despite their more communitarian traditions. Those who insist on collective sin and collective redemption rarely find themselves in the majority—as both pro-labor priests in the 1930s and civil rights ministers in the 1960s discovered. It's no accident that the stronger welfare states in Europe developed after World War II in nations that either had a Catholic heritage—like France and Austria—or had mostly abandoned an evangelical one—like Norway and the Netherlands. In such places, secular solidarity grew from or took the place of a pious community.

Perhaps another crisis like the Great Depression will bring back the idea that it is urgent once again for Americans to organize for social justice. In the meantime, the increasing diversity of religions here should gradually weaken the primacy of Christians who think like George W. Bush and John Ashcroft. But *Hellfire Nation* offers convincing evidence that no political advance has ever taken place in the United States without a moral awakening flushed with notions about what the Lord would have us do. It's enough to make a secular leftist gag—and then grudgingly acknowledge the power of prayer. ■





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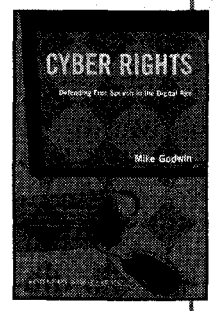

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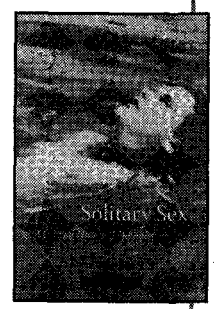

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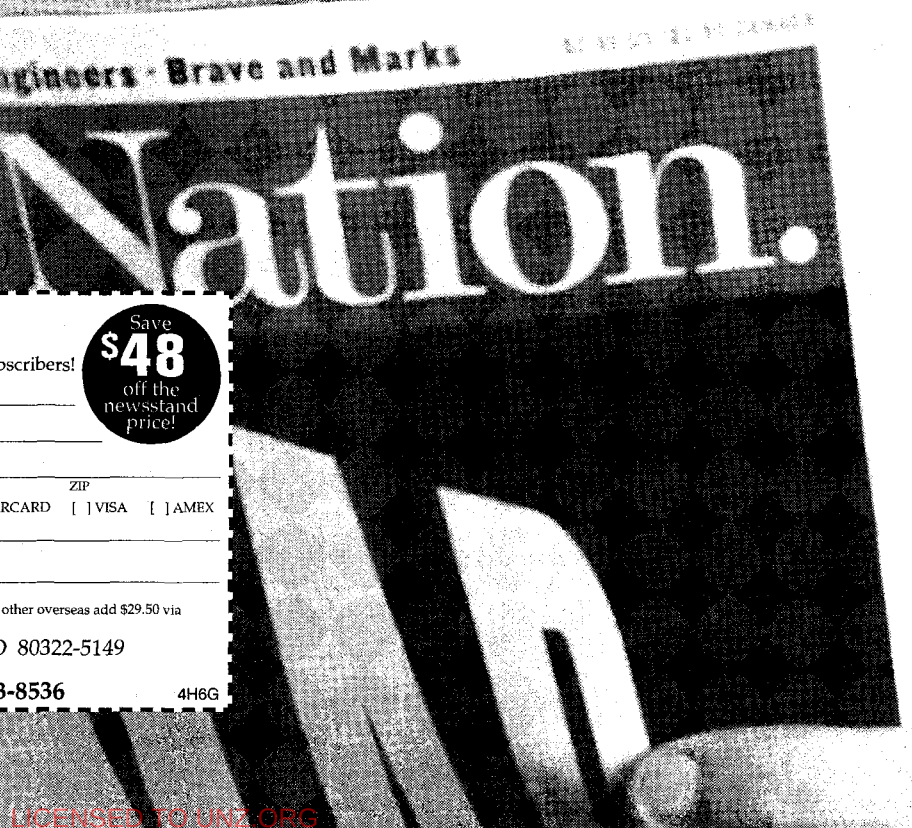

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Briefly Noted

THE QUALITY OF LIFE REPORT: A Novel.
By Meghan Daum.
Viking. 309 pp. $24.95.

In this winning debut novel from Meghan Daum (known best for her essay collection *My Misspent Youth*, Open City), wry TV reporter Lucinda Trout bails on big-city life for Prairie City, USA—a tiny metropolis bound by its motto, "Open Hearts, Open Minds." While reporting from PC for *New York Up Early!* on housewives addicted to methamphetamine, Trout falls for the heartland. She convinces her boss in New York to station her there for a full year; Trout envisions producing "The Quality of Life Report," a series that will allow urban hermits to breathe vicariously through her in a place where "quality of life flows like water." Despite the cheap rent and good cheer, however, Trout's own quality of life steadily declines in PC. Her new, bad-boy boyfriend becomes a drug addict; her rented farm is freezing cold; her stylized TV segments, during which neighbors are forced to don plaid shirts and cowboy boots, justifiably alienate most of the community.

In the course of telling Trout's story, Daum manages to present, then explode, a motley crew of American stereotypes: the rail-thin media hotshot; the country bumpkin; the folk-singer lesbian; the jaded ex–New Yorker who wants a simpler life. No one escapes Daum's wit or criticism; ultimately, each earns her respect. (It bears mentioning, too, that animals inhabit this book, including a pig, for reasons better left unexplained, named Diva Starz.) If the premise sounds a bit stale—big-city girl searches for happiness, love and better life in small town—*The Quality of Life Report* is anything but. Daum's humor and humanity have seen to that.

I AM NOT JACKSON POLLOCK: Stories.
By John Haskell.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 180 pp. $20.

The cover of *I Am Not Jackson Pollock* advises us to expect a handful of stories. But "story" does not properly describe what lies within these pages. True, Haskell's pieces are, to an extent, fictional narratives. However, they're also haunting history lessons, sophisticated notes on film and melancholy meditations on survival and death. In "Glenn Gould in Six Parts," Haskell writes that "all of us create a world...an individual world in which we function." And it's that personal space—around known figures like Jackson Pollock, Hedy Lamarr, Glenn Gould and Laika the Cosmonaut Dog—Haskell lovingly imagines, explores and embellishes.

More examples of Haskell's peculiar sense of form: In "Elephant Feelings," Haskell links the stories of Topsy the elephant (who was electrocuted at Coney Island in 1903 for killing a man), Saartjie Baartman (who is better known as the Hottentot Venus) and the Hindu god Ganesha (who walks with the body of a man but carries the head of an elephant) to illustrate how the combination of frustrated love and anger can destroy a life. In "The Judgment of Psycho" he jumps from an investigation of the sexual dynamic between Janet Leigh and Anthony Perkins to a discussion of the Trojan War. Each piece is equally original, sad and strange; a collection recommended for artsy recent college grads, moms who like independent film and anyone who *prefers* feeling blue.

RUMBLE, YOUNG MAN, RUMBLE: Stories.
By Benjamin Cavell.
Knopf. 191 pp. $22.

Neil LaBute couldn't have written a colder, funnier or more brutal collection of stories about what it means to be a man than this debut by Benjamin Cavell. A former collegiate boxer and editor of the Harvard *Crimson*, Cavell uses, among others, a pumped-up paintball player, a young politician, a finished boxer and a sensitive writer to examine the darker side of masculinity. But it's Cavell's style—practically naked, muscular and tense—that might be the most stereotypically male thing about this book. The spare description, the tight dialogue and the crude jokes all work here. Even when Cavell's characters are overtly frightening—like Logan Bryant, the paintball enthusiast/sporting-goods store employee/iron pumper in "Balls, Balls, Balls," whose "cock is nine and a half inches long and as thick as some men's wrists"—their insecurities insure their complexity. (After "some slut" tells Logan that a colleague of his is "packing almost eleven," our narrator confesses that he's "been seriously considering the experimental penile-enlargement surgery.") Cavell's stories aren't for the easily offended. But if, for you, a little black humor goes a long way, there is plenty in this collection to laugh at.

AFTER: A Novel.
By Francine Prose.
HarperCollins/Joanna Colter Books.
330 pp. $16.99.

In the wake of a Columbine-like tragedy some fifty miles away, Central High becomes a virtual prison. To "protect" Central's students, grief counselor Dr. Willner—who's more like a prison warden—slowly strips away each student's rights: A dress code is imposed, cell phones are banned, drug tests are administered, speech is regulated and potentially problematic students are efficiently whisked off campus, sent to work camps and never heard from again. Even creepier, as the school administration sends a nightly e-mail dispatch to parents explaining how these precautions are integral to students' safety, moms and dads become robotic, stunned into compliance by Dr. Willner's scare tactics. As in any good teen apocalypse-style novel, to save themselves, the kids must trust no one.

Tom Bishop, narrator of this Young Adult novel, is a sweet, intelligent athlete at the center of a diverse group of basketball players, each of whom struggles with the crackdown in his own way. But Prose, known for shrewd criticism and smart (adult) novels, has made Tom's voice too plain, punctuated by random spurts of teen-speak, in an effort to appeal to the middle-school set. While Tom isn't an unconvincing character, it remains to be seen whether an intermittent "man" or "dude" or "bingo" in the dialogue is enough to sustain the attention of this book's intended audience. Let's hope so; despite its lack of literary flair, Prose's chilling tale provides a lesson in civil liberties that every kid—and adult—should learn. ■

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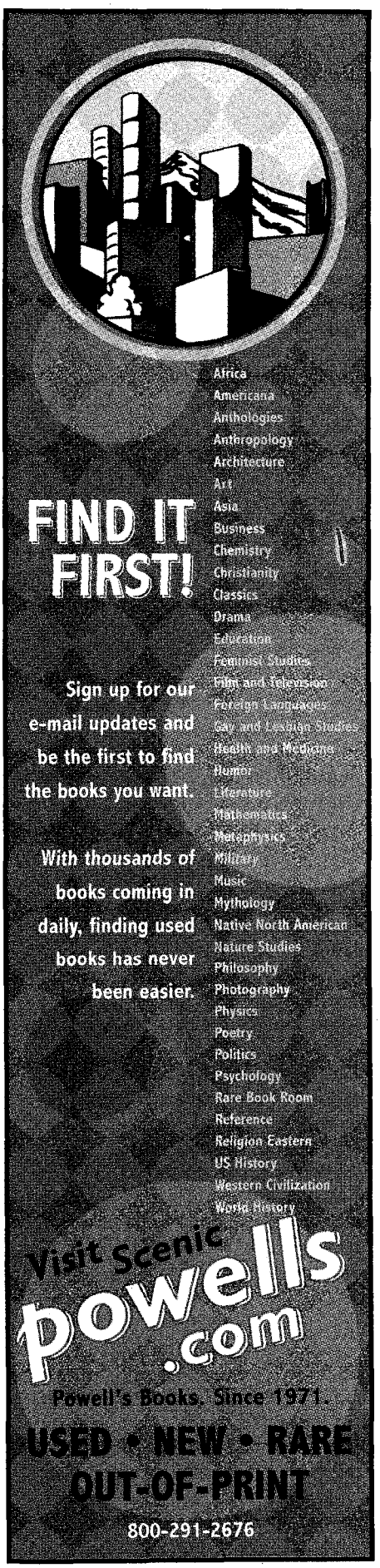

The Unrepentant Modernist

RUSSELL PLATT

A LIFE IN MUSIC. By Daniel Barenboim. Arcade. 246 pp. $25.95.

PARALLELS AND PARADOXES: Explorations in Music and Society. By Daniel Barenboim and Edward W. Said. Pantheon. 186 pp. $24.

Near the end of *Parallels and Paradoxes*, a recent collection of dialogues on music and society between the conductor and pianist Daniel Barenboim, music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO), and his good friend, the scholar and music critic Edward Said, there is an extraordinary moment when the two men discuss the perspective of the past. Barenboim, bravely extolling the virtues of such Modernist radicals as Carter, Boulez and Birtwistle, not only puts them in the company of Beethoven but insists that we think of Beethoven the way we think of them: "He's a modern composer.... The most important thing is to arrive at a way to play Beethoven with a sense of discovery, as if it were being written today." Invigorating stuff.

Yet Said can't quite go along: "But what about the pathos of the past?... There's a kind of ruthlessness in history.... One feels that certain things are irrecoverable because they are past." For a musical example he offers the Berg *Violin Concerto*, a tragic and deeply expressive (and universally beloved) Modernist work that ends with the quotation of a Bach chorale—something the conductor finds hard to accept.

> Barenboim: I'm bothered by it, because...somehow it introduces a foreign element into the structure, into the piece.
>
> Said: But what if you were told by him... "Well, I intended it."
>
> Barenboim: Yes, I'm sure. Well, I'm still bothered by it.

Both men surely know that the chorale's first four notes are woven into the twelve-tone row Berg uses to compose the piece, making it both foreign and integral—in other words, a paradox. But the exchange points to the core of Barenboim's character: an aggressive, intellectual optimist whose undeniable generosity has been underlined by a certain ruthlessness of his own. It is this temperament, as much as his enormous raw talent, that has made him one of the most distinctive—and sometimes controversial—musicians of our time, and in the newly revised and expanded edition of his memoir he reveals perhaps more of it than he intended.

Granted, this book, like *Parallels and Paradoxes*, is an absolute gift: What other conductor active in America—after Bernstein—could mix nuanced discussions of Buber, Aristotle, Spinoza, Wagner and Middle East politics with coolheaded musical analysis—and plenty of shop talk besides? But whereas the tempestuous, profligate Lenny enjoyed the love of millions, Barenboim's renown, though well earned, has had a cooler tone. Barenboim inherited his post in Chicago, in 1991, from Georg Solti—admittedly, a daunting act to follow. Solti, a refugee Hungarian Jew who established his career in London and Vienna after World War II, became a Windy City treasure: Sports fans compared him to Dick Butkus, and the cabbies knew him by sight. Barenboim, just as mobile as his predecessor (he is also general music director of the Berlin State Opera, conducts Wagner frequently at Bayreuth and gives piano recitals throughout the world), has tried hard to ingratiate himself with the locals with outreach-type events, but somehow he always leaves the impression that his services are needed elsewhere. His indefatigable advocacy of the most complex and intellectual of composers has been laudable, but unpopular with subscribers; and a number of CSO players have complained of an arrogant podium manner. And while Barenboim's richly detailed performances of Brahms, Bruckner and Wagner (not to mention his favorite contemporaries) are justly admired for their force and sweep, performances of other repertory—at the podium or the keyboard—sometimes find him underprepared.

A Life in Music, which the conductor wrote with the assistance of Michael Lewin and Phillip Huscher, is not a particularly supple or elegant volume; Barenboim is more of a raconteur than a writer. But his authorial voice—bold, declarative, often stern, sometimes forgiving—comes right through. Barenboim, perhaps more than any of his famous friends, has lived a quintes-

Russell Platt is on the staff of The New Yorker.

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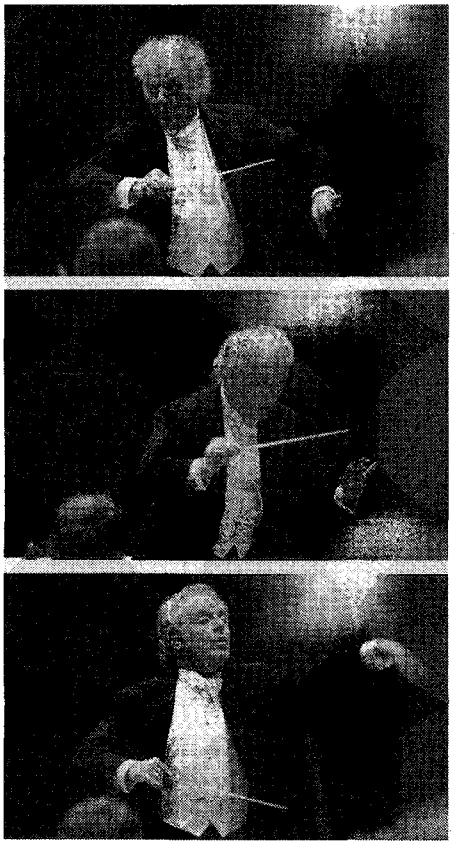
sentially twentieth-century life. Born in 1942 in Argentina to a family of immigrant Russian Jews, he is taken by his parents to Europe ten years later, where his prodigious talent can be nurtured under such podium giants as Igor Markevich and Wilhelm Furtwängler; grows up in Israel during its first years of struggle and conflict; begins a busy life of touring as one of the world's leading pianists and conductors; endures the tragic decline of his first wife, the brilliant and enormously popular cellist Jacqueline du Pré, after she is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1973 (she died in 1987), a marriage that cast him into the full glare of the modern media; and finally, in the 1990s, strives to excel at the very traditional role of music director when economic and cultural forces, in both America and Europe, are threatening its viability and prestige. History and fate have delivered this man an exceptional load of gifts, challenges and responsibilities, and *A Life in Music* attempts to explain how he has borne them. His conclusions may sometimes seem conflicted, even false, but he earns our respect as a man who, through it all, has tried to craft an existence based on fundamental laws.

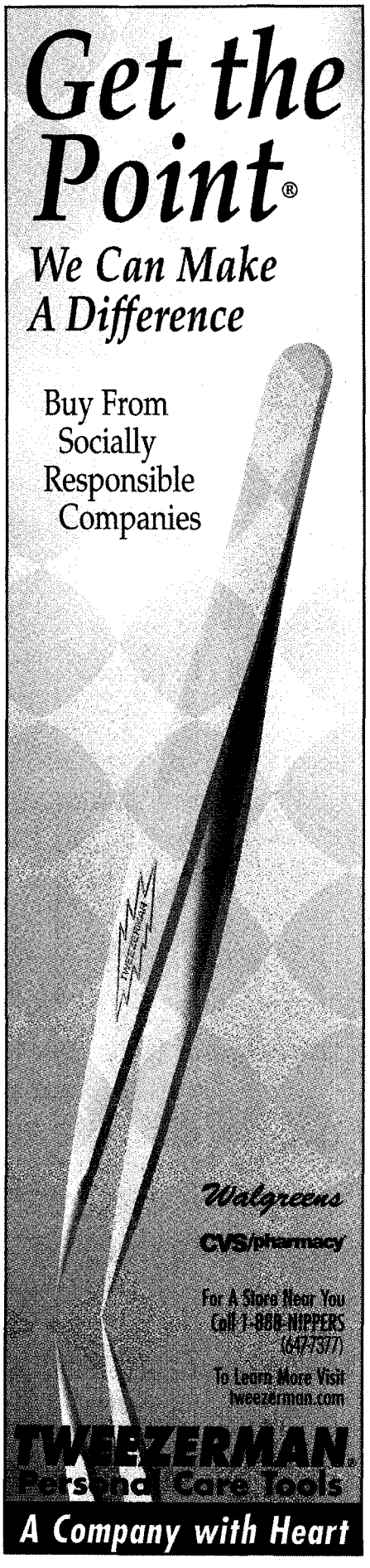


Barenboim's credo is to keep things "private" (a word he uses five times on the book's first page): "The autobiographical thread in this book exists only to give a certain continuity to the reflections on music and on the relationship between music and life.... I have simply tried to write what it feels like to be obsessed with music and to have the curiosity to examine this obsession." This understandable reserve stems, of course, from the difficult years with du Pré. Her eight appearances in the photographs section seem almost an attempt to compensate for this; one of the pictures, taken during the legendary 1969 recording sessions of the Beethoven piano trios (with the violinist Pinchas Zukerman) at Abbey Road, shows her touching Barenboim's hand, tapping a rhythm, perhaps, while listening to playbacks, while he seems to swoon with love and the love of music—a touch of fire that unified his personal and professional lives.

But listening to those recordings today can be difficult: They have a harshness of attack and cocksure confidence that linger in Barenboim's playing and conducting to this day. (Some five years later Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau would put Barenboim's forthright manner to brilliant use, when the baritone brought him in to record the Olympian piano parts of Hugo Wolf's *Goethe Lieder*.) Reading of Barenboim's upbringing in 1950s Israel, however, helps to put this in perspective:

> This had a very strong influence on my life, it affected my way of thinking and later my way of making music. I came from a very different tradition...social graces were essential in Argentina, whereas in Israel there was a passionate rejection of such superficial matters.... Even elementary traits, such as politeness to each other, were scorned.... But it was not just an attitude...it derived from a healthy preoccupation with idealism and positive thinking.

And so it goes. He demands the best of music and musicians, even if it leads him to extremes: "The greatness of a musician is measured by the degree of fanaticism he brings to his playing." He speaks of conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos as "a very pure musician of great intensity and integrity"; the Czech conductor Rafael Kubelík—who advises him, "you must sometimes sacrifice the beauty of the moment for the beauty of a long line and structure"—is "a really independent musician" who had "adopted a line without any artistic compromise, the line of most and not of least resistance." He is astonishingly thorough, performing the music of his beloved Austro-German masters in cycles of concerts (giving Beethoven, Mahler and Bruckner, in effect, little Bayreuth festivals of their own) and holding forth in great



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detail on how interpretive differences in German and French music are ineluctably governed by the peculiarities of their languages and cultural concerns—a less than convincing argument, since his writing about French music and musicians (except on Debussy, long an Honorary German Composer in advanced circles) is not without a trace of condescension. Barenboim would like us to believe in a Debussy Style, a Beethoven Style and a Wagner Style, but in performance there is an undeniable Barenboim Style that tends to rule. And why not?

There are other moments when this kind of missionary zeal can get the better of him. The works of Carter and Birtwistle may be wonderfully unalike, but to maintain that they each "give the lie to the argument that all of today's music is either very light and popular or very complex and difficult" seems nonsensical: It takes an enormous amount of erudition to detect, let alone enjoy, the difference between Carter's thickets of complexity and Birtwistle's brutal sonic onslaughts. And yet this is also a man who yearns for a sense of balance between reason and emotion, in music as well as life. He warns against letting the "suffering and passion" of musical expression infect one's personal life and, in very likable fashion, praises the very Latin need for a bit of *dolce far niente* in a heavily booked-up day. ("I cannot get used to the American habit of having a hamburger for lunch between two rehearsals.") His assessments of such idols as the conductors John Barbirolli and Leopold Stokowski, both of whom were far more "intuitive" and flamboyant musicians than the cerebral Barenboim, not only glow with generosity and warmth, but with insight too—as when he notes how Barbirolli backed up his deeply emotive sense of musical logic with professional discipline by personally bowing the string parts of nearly every piece he conducted. He praises the pianist Claudio Arrau not only for his keen interests in literature and art (interests many musicians, surprisingly, don't have) but as an ideal "fusion of the Latin and German mentality"; he notes with awe Furtwängler's gift for "thinking with the heart and feeling with the brain." The ultimate tribute to the power of intuition, of course, goes to du Pré: "I have never encountered anyone for whom music was such a natural form of expression as it was for Jacqueline.... She was really a child of nature."

But even this admirable need for balance can lead him astray, never more so than when he is discussing the early-music movement. While acknowledging that these musicians have "provided all of us with much food for thought," he notes that "it would be childish not to adopt certain uses of expressive means we have become aware of through Wagner." Barenboim the rational positivist enlists Goethe in support of his argument, maintaining that the "moment you absorb something, it becomes part of you, but then you must adapt it to your needs," but that implies that everyone has to absorb Wagner, an idea he develops at length in *Parallels and Paradoxes*—and opens up a musico-political Pandora's box along the way. Wagner, in the face of great opposition, revolutionized the acoustic aspect of music, not only by expanding exponentially the possibilities of orchestral sound but by adapting the dramatic process of his operas—a sense of constant, imperceptible transition—to his performances of Beethoven and other composers. For Barenboim these are permanent changes, and

> the revival of historical practices and playing on period instruments, is also, in fact—whether knowingly or not—a reaction

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against [the] Wagnerian concept of the continuity of sound. The principle of these instruments and this way of making music is precisely to articulate more and to be able to cut the sound and to cut the harmonic pressure of the music.

And when Wagner was striving for this concept of sound ("the weight of the sound," as Barenboim emphasizes), on whom did he vent his contempt? On the Jewish composer Felix Mendelssohn—the original early-music maven, whose Bach concerts restored that composer's music to the general repertory. Wagner condemned his performances as light and superficial. But why does he complain "bitterly" about Mendelssohn's brisk tempos? Because, as Barenboim notes, "if the content was poor, the speed had to be greater." None of us can know what Mendelssohn's performances were exactly like (I suspect they were rather good), and Barenboim is careful not to directly link the practices of the past and present—he just describes them in distressingly similar terms. *He* is definitely not one for "superficiality," and he is passionately in Wagner's corner. Barenboim may well have a point; so does his great colleague Boulez, a man who finds a certain weakness in a society that is afraid to destroy things and move on. But in trying to explain, in his fiercely rational way, why Wagner disliked Mendelssohn's performances—it's the tempo, stupid—Barenboim just looks naïve, since musical and racial politics can never be fully separated in Wagner's diatribes. Touchingly, he wants to sift out the good things in Wagner, seeing them as part of a continuum of beneficent German thought. But if you wanted to hear the musical "Good Germany," you wouldn't listen to Wagner—you'd listen to Hindemith. To truly listen to Wagner is to recognize all that he was, horrendous and sublime, and somehow emerge unscathed.

Barenboim's need to reconcile opposites is most useful when he examines the situation in the Middle East. Barenboim's characteristic force is not absent here; the ultimate example was his deeply controversial push to break the Israeli ban on public performances of Wagner's music in 2001, when he offered to close a concert of the Staatskapelle Berlin with an encore of the Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde*—allowing a handful of upset listeners to leave the auditorium first. (Thousands stayed and cheered.) Another example of his independence is his quest to encounter the Palestinian "other," and his arguments here are daring and constructive. He is adamant that peace depends not only on mutual recognition by Israel and her Arab neighbors but on Israeli Jews' transcending the prism of the Holocaust:

> What is required [is] an absolute transformation of how a Jew sees himself now—which is totally different from 1942, from 1948, or from 1967.... This is why there is a connection between the problem of playing Wagner in Israel and the Palestinian issue, because we hold on to things from Europe that remind us of our Jewishness, but which have nothing to do with the current situation.

Which, in other words, implies that Israeli music-lovers can and should "adapt" to modernity by way of Wagner, just as early-music performers should absorb the acoustical innovations of...Wagner. When Barenboim "adapts" Wagner's speed-content analogy to explain the breakdown of the Mideast peace negotiations (the book is full of music/life comparisons), it's an illuminating moment. But to suggest that Jews have something to learn from one of their

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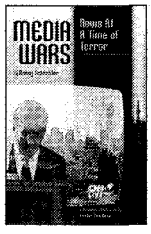

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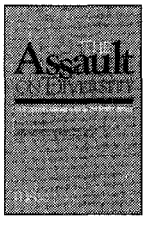

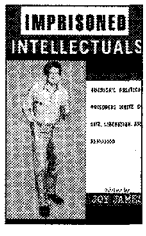

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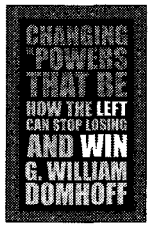

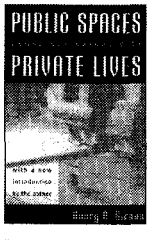

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greatest enemies is either brilliantly provocative or stunningly impudent—or, perhaps, both. Still, whatever one thinks of Barenboim's manners, there's no denying that, in his own field, he has taken the lead, having organized with Said the three "West-Eastern Divan" youth orchestra workshops in Weimar and Chicago, which brought together Arab and Israeli musicians to work, learn and live with one another. The workshops were named after a volume of verse by Goethe, which was not only a response to the work of the Persian bard Hafiz (which he read in German translation) but an experiment in combined identity. "In my opinion it is impossible for anyone at the beginning of the twenty-first century believably to claim a single identity," Barenboim writes, not only citing his own experience—Argentine and Israeli, European and American—but going back to Mozart, "one of the first pan-Europeans," who spoke and composed in Italian, German and French. "Israel should...create a fusion of East and West," he maintains. "We could very well see a second Age of Enlightenment."

Barenboim's public bravery and restless curiosity have an almost magical ability to wipe away his rough spots; one finishes his memoir in a forgiving and grateful mood, keeping his enormous talents always in mind. This is not a perfect man, or even a perfect musician. But as one of Chicago's most eminent listeners once remarked, "Who else is there?" ■

A Chef in Love

CHARLOTTE INNES

CRESCENT: A Novel. By Diana Abu-Jaber. Norton. 349 pp. $24.95.

As the bombs cease falling on Baghdad, and the world argues over an American presence in Iraq, the publication of Diana Abu-Jaber's funny, thoughtful second novel, *Crescent*, seems uncannily appropriate. Although Abu-Jaber can't have known when she wrote *Crescent* that history would take such a sudden, violent turn, her story of a love affair between an immigrant Iraqi professor, Han, and Sirine, an Iraqi-American female chef in a Middle Eastern neighborhood in Los Angeles, poignantly symbolizes reconciliation and making peace with the past at a time when the prospects could hardly seem more distant.

At first glance, *Crescent* appears to be yet another contribution to the burgeoning trend of culinary novels—the recipe-laden magical realism of Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, Joanne Harris's celebratory *Chocolat* or the macabre short stories in *The Devil's Larder* by Jim Crace. And it's true that the delicate aromas of roasted lamb, rice and pine nuts, tabbouleh and knaffea, a fragrant pastry of layered nuts, sugar and cheese, waft deliciously and authentically through the book, as does some lovely food imagery. A poet's voice "ticks like a whisk in a copper bowl"; pouring "hot syrup over cold baklava or cold syrup over hot" is a "metaphysical" process; and Sirine's boss, Um-Nadia, reads Sirine's coffee grounds as part of the hiring process, seeing "sharp knife, quick hands, white apron, and the sadness of a chef. 'Chefs know—nothing lasts,' she told Sirine. 'In the mouth, then gone.'" Clearly, Abu-Jaber feels passionately about food and has thought deeply about its philosophical implications. (In fact, she regularly writes restaurant reviews for the *Oregonian* in Portland, where she is currently writer-in-residence at Portland State University.) Just as Virginia Woolf's classic work *Mrs. Dalloway*, with its nuanced look at human behavior amid the social upheavals following World War I, is more than a story about an upper-class woman preparing for a party, *Crescent* goes far beyond menu-planning.

The big issues here are exile, identity and the transformative power of true love, with Saddam Hussein a sinister, looming presence throughout the book, as Han wrestles with his losses under Hussein's regime, and Sirine slowly comes to terms with her own mixed heritage—themes familiar from Abu-Jaber's first novel, *Arabian Jazz*, which focused on an Arab-American family in upstate New York where Abu-Jaber, the daughter of a Jordanian father and an American mother, also grew up, in a town near Syracuse.

Like Woolf, Abu-Jaber does an admirable job of showing how small moments can nudge a person to take large actions, in the domestic as well as the political sphere. Typical is the accumulation of small events that seem to urge Han toward revisiting his home country, even though he knows he may be killed upon arrival. Abu-Jaber shows how patterns emerge out of life's seeming randomness, naturally and gradually, in the midst of daily routines—the rhythms of Sirine's cooking life, as she bicycles back and forth from her uncle's apartment where she lives to her job at the small Lebanese cafe in Westwood—with the same mix of order and chance inherent in a recipe. People may think they're jumping into something new, Abu-Jaber suggests, but they cannot escape their origins, whether they're cooking, politicking, falling in love or living in exile. Just as a successful dish retains the flavor of all the original ingredients, she says, a happy life absorbs all its influences. Even a well-lived life's questions are never entirely resolved, just like a good story.

And how to tell a story is another important strand in a book filled with deep undercurrents, which have come together in a smooth-flowing narrative, enlivened by vivid erotic encounters, good-humored, sometimes laugh-out-loud-funny conversations at the cafe, between Han and Sirine, and between her uncle and his friends, as well as atmospheric descriptions of lush Los Angeles neighborhoods—including the corner of Westwood that is in real life a mix of Iranian, Lebanese, Iraqi and other Middle Eastern stores and restaurants—"Teherangeles," as Abu-Jaber puts it. But what's truly endearing and convincing about this book and takes it beyond political allegory is its fairy-tale quality, which manages, paradoxically enough, to ground the story in the real world and to give it the archetypal feeling that characterizes a fable. Because *Crescent* deals in real despotic rulers (Saddam Hussein) and real (if romantic) love, with all its ups and downs—just as classic fairy tales of old grew out of real stories of cruelty and loss, and the eternal human yearning (not always fulfilled) for redemption and happiness—Abu-Jaber's story never crosses over into Disney cuteness.

Like the heroines of old whose mothers often died young (stemming from the common reality of death in childbirth), Sirine lost her parents when she was 9, when, as emergency care workers for the Red Cross, they were killed "in a clash between tribes while on assignment in Africa"—which is why she lives with her uncle, a wise old man whose kindness and sense of humor more than make up for her

Charlotte Innes, a writer in Los Angeles, reviews books for various publications. She also recently won a first prize in the "Poetry in the Windows" contest in Los Angeles.

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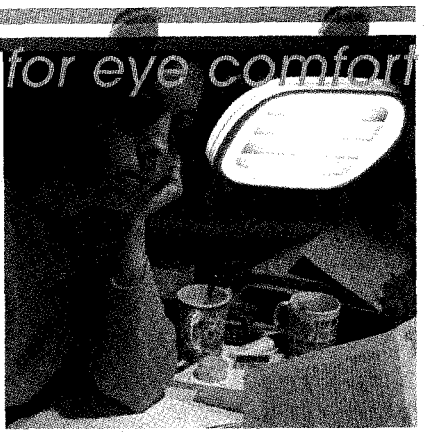

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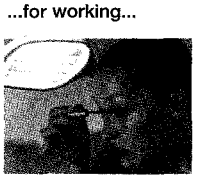

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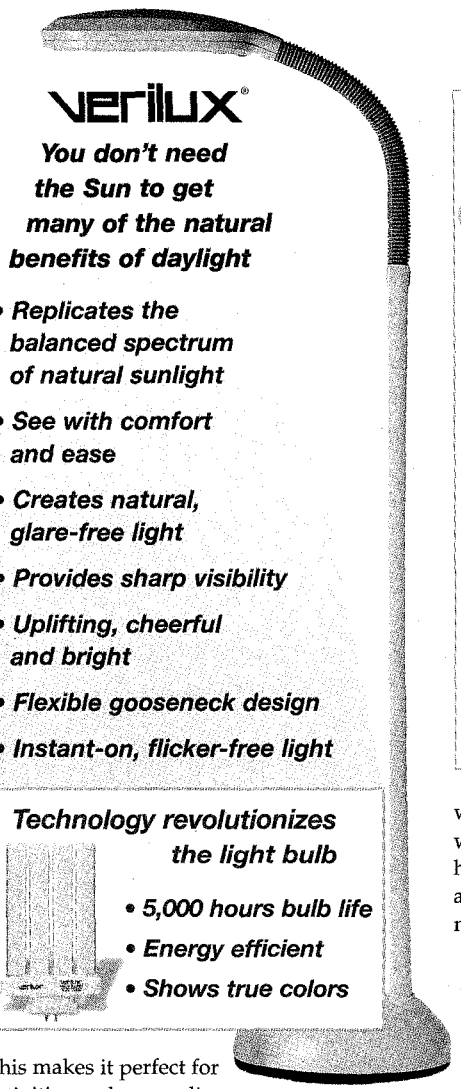

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lack of parentage. Sirine, at 39, has all the qualities essential for a career as a good princess. Despite our stereotyped notion of women with mixed Middle Eastern heritage as dark-skinned, Sirine has "skin so pale it has the bluish cast of skim milk," and a "wild blond head of hair." And like all good princesses, she not only makes great baklava, she is "so kind and gentle-voiced" and—as her bicycling in the Los Angeles car culture denotes—she has a mix of innocence and common sense that endears her to everyone around her. Especially to the handsome new Iraqi professor, Hanif Al Eyad (*a k a* Han), in the Near Eastern studies department of a university never named but clearly meant to be UCLA, where Sirine's uncle also teaches (and where Abu-Jaber taught briefly).

The fairy-tale quality of Han and Sirine's romance, as well as the symbolic convergence of East and West, is also inherent in the intertwining of literary allusions throughout the book. Abu-Jaber said in a recent interview that she originally planned to write a modern version of William Shakespeare's *Othello*, but dropped the idea when she realized that these days "there are no more villains." (Take that, President Bush!) But there are clear traces of the *Othello* story throughout. Han is very dark, and Sirine, like Desdemona, very blond. Han is also slightly larger than life, and he tells Sirine stories of his wanderings, as Othello did with Desdemona. And like Othello, despite his commanding and likable presence, Han is at odds with his white surroundings, conflicted about all he left behind in Iraq, teetering between cultures. He is symbolized throughout by the oryx, a gazelle-like creature "always wandering, looking for his lost love, and they say he has to go away before he can find his way home again," as Han puts it during an early conversation in the cafe. (Significantly, he calls the oryx a "ghazal," which also is the name of a kind of Persian love poem that uses fragmented stanzas and repetition to effect a searching, obsessive quality.)

The dark side of the fairy tale weaves throughout the book as well. Sirine often has a sense of someone watching her, a sense of menace that mirrors old superstitions about the evil eye, as well as the modern reality of the CIA and the spy networks of despotic regimes—and personal paranoia. There is even a subplot involving the loss of a scarf that echoes the misunderstandings over the handkerchief that set Othello against his wife. The villain who's not a villain who surely caused Abu-Jaber's *Othello* analogy to falter is Nathan, an American friend of Han's. With his lean and hungry look, Nathan seems a little like Iago, the Machiavellian figure in *Othello*—he barely eats, in contrast to the other food-loving characters—and he's an Iago-like spy in that he photographs everything he sees, so much so that he starts to seem voyeuristic, even a little sinister at times, another menacing figure lurking in the book's watchful shadows. But Nathan is also a complicated, all-too-human figure, an artist struggling to interpret reality photographically; an American obsessed with Iraq in the way that is typical of the falsely romantic Orientalism that obsesses some Westerners; and he's a tragic figure, symbolic of the real losses in the book—he lost his first great love in Iraq—a man whom pain has shaped into "a monk" with "sunken cheeks, hungry lunar shadow eyes, a body inhabited by an old spirit," that is, Iago transformed into his opposite, a man of profound feelings. And real feeling, not black-and-white labeling, is the bottom line in *Crescent*.

Also winding delightfully through the book is a real fairy tale, told in fragmentary fashion like the old Arabic story *Thousand and One Nights*, not by Scheherazade, the Persian princess of the original, but by Sirine's uncle, who calls it the "moralless story" of his "cousin" Abdelrahman Salahadin—though it's clearly not a symbol-less tale—about a sailor who repeatedly sells himself into slavery, steals the money back, and effects a fake drowning, only to resurface elsewhere. The story is of a piece with the book's recurring water and ocean imagery, of death and rebirth—one of Han and Sirine's first meetings is at a pool party! Nor is it really a "moralless" tale, since it contains an implied critique of Western imperialism and exploitation, from the adventures of the Victorian explorer Sir Richard Burton to the career of film idol Omar Sharif.

The only part of *Crescent* that feels a touch forced is Abu-Jaber's delineation of Sirine's growing awareness of her Iraqi heritage. Suddenly she's attending an Islamic women's group meeting, going off to watch whirling dervishes with a poet friend of Han's. These episodes seem too obviously like lessons. Otherwise, this is a story that unfolds beautifully, as lightly and naturally as a roll of silk. ■

Southern Man

ARTHUR C. DANTO

CÉZANNE AND PROVENCE: The Painter in His Culture.
By Nina M. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer. University of Chicago Press. 323 pp. $65.

In 1900 Maurice Denis painted a large canvas titled *Hommage à Cézanne*, which shows the esteemed master next to one of his paintings and surrounded by a crowd of admiring younger artists. The scene is set in the gallery of Ambroise Vollard, in which Cézanne had attained instant celebrity through a now legendary exhibition in 1895. Denis's painting is more conservative in style than the painting by Cézanne that it depicts, which is marked by certain stylistic eccentricities that divided the Parisian art world into two camps—those who found his work crazily inept, and those who found it stunningly original. Cézanne's *Nature Morte au Compotier* is a still life featuring a fruit dish—a *compotier*—with a circular lip. The lip does not look the way a circular form would appear in normal perspective. Cézanne shows it instead as a kind of compressed, awkward ellipse. And Denis, in picturing a painting by an artist other than himself, needed to show it the way it really looked. So his painting had to be academically impeccable. It was crucial that he demonstrate that he was accurately depicting a painting that was awkward and "wrong." It was precisely because of the *compotier*'s eccentricity that the important and advanced artists in *Hommage à Cézanne* were showing their respect. Denis's painting shows why Cézanne, in his advanced years, had become the hottest artist in Paris.

Not everyone who first saw Denis's tribute to Cézanne would have understood why the artists—Bonnard, Vuillard, Redon and others, including Denis himself—found Cézanne someone to admire. In the early phases of Modernism, viewers were hard-pressed to decide whether paintings that departed from accepted academic standards were innovative or simply incompetent. Were the artists in Denis's painting sincere in their praise of Cézanne, or were they secretly mocking him? (Think of the ambiguity of a famous dinner party, a few years

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later, that Picasso and his pals threw for Henri Rousseau, the great primitivist.) But even if one were prepared to accept Cézanne's seeming idiosyncrasies as innovative, the question remained of why his style was admired. It is the great merit of this fascinating book that it explains what the figures in Denis's painting, including the dealer Ambroise Vollard himself, appreciated Cézanne for. Their reasons, it turns out, were strikingly different from our own. In her deeply researched and utterly convincing study *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture*, Nina M. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer argues that what gave Cézanne's work its great éclat was connected with the prevailing politics of taste. Cézanne and his work were believed to embody values and virtues antithetical to those for which Paris stood. He was believed to be, borrowing a title from Louis Aragon, *Un paysan à Paris*—a defiantly regionalist artist. The Cézanne portrayed in her book is almost the antithesis of the Cézanne upon whom the whole spirit and logic of Modernist painting was erected:

> In the late 1880s and early 1890s, symbolist critics in the capital had already begun setting the foundation of...a portrait of Cézanne as barbaric, naïve, unsophisticated, and "primitive," in a word, as the opposite of everything civilized and Parisian. His paintings were exalted for their naïveté, simplicity, severity, and lack of naturalism (such as realistic rendering of proportions, perspective, or color).

The notorious lip of the *compotier* would have been a case in point.

Like Gauguin, the author writes, Cézanne was "possessed of an ambiguous identity—part modern master, part primitive eccentric, insider and outsider all in one, known to some but a mystery to most—his persona as much as his works were surrounded by an aura of outlandishness." In France at the time, as indeed today, there were deep tensions between Paris and the provinces, many of whose inhabitants resented the prevailing policy of cultural centralization, which treated Paris as the luminous capital and everyplace else as more or less the sticks. Thus, when the Universal Exposition of 1900 was conceived as a showcase for France's industrial and cultural achievements, the decision to hold it in Paris wounded provincial pride. "Paris absorbs everything, Paris confiscates everything," an editorialist complained. As Athanassoglou-Kallmyer observes, "The times were well primed for the promotion of a regional artist in the capital. It was primarily because Vollard saw Cézanne in these terms that he gave him the exhibition that made both their reputations. "Vollard sensed the timeliness and advantage of a show that would bring a rustic artist from the provinces into the orbit of the capital while regionalist debate over the Universal Exposition raged."

The critical response to Cézanne's 1895 exhibition is an object lesson in the optics of art appreciation: the marked eccentricities, epitomized by the lip of the *compotier*, were seen as evidence of Cézanne's Provençal authenticity.

> The singularly overlapping vocabulary of the critics generates a portrait of Cézanne as a genuine cultural outsider, unpolished and savage ("fruste et sauvage"); suspicious, restless, and self-taught ("méfiant," "inquiet," "autodidacte"); naïve and ignorant ("naïf et ignorant tout"); conscientious, simple, honest, and clumsy ("conscientieux, simple, franc mais lourd"). His paintings were described as the products of a peasant ("production paysanne") characterized by "roughness," "rusticity," "awkwardness" ("gaucherie"), coarsely brushed surfaces, and "robust" colors.

To realize that this was the language of critical praise opens a window into the temper of the Parisian art world of 1895, part of which saw Cézanne in much the same way that a corresponding segment of the New York art world nearly a century later viewed the paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Cézanne's peasant authenticity was even interpreted as a sign of virility—his apparently rude and coarse paintings were those of a "real man," as against the effeminacy of academic art!

Needless to say, these are very different reasons for admiring Cézanne's painting than we are given today, when we see his work under the influence of the modernisms for which it is almost certainly responsible. "He is the father of us all," Picasso was to say, early and often. But the praise certainly corresponded to an aspect of Cézanne's personality. Cézanne spoke with a heavy Provençal accent, and probably flaunted his provincial identity in his manners, values and attitudes, notwithstanding the fact that, whatever his affectations and regional loyalties, he was an exceedingly sophisticated and cultivated man, whose correspondence is filled with Latin phrases and classical allusions. As his late letters show, he was considerably closer to the kind of artist that we now take him to have been, though it is of the greatest value to perceive him in the otherness of his own times, when it was impossible to see his art within the framework of a revolution in artistic understanding that had not yet been grasped. Cézanne's childhood friend Émile Zola saw him as an aborted genius, and based the central character of his 1886 novel *L'Oeuvre* on Cézanne, whom he depicts as a madman and a failure, who finally takes his own life. There really was no way, even for his most ardent and devoted admirers, to understand his work other than as that of a gifted bumpkin.

Prizing Cézanne as an authentic specimen of Provençal culture was part of a larger movement of cultural criticism to which, undoubtedly, we owe one important aspect of Modernism in art. It is impossible to downplay the degree to which the perception of Jackson Pollock as a redneck contributed to his breakthrough. The European avant-garde was united in its view that the West was washed up, and that art needed to be refreshed by an inflow from other traditions. Gauguin found inspiration in Breton folk art before he embarked for the South Seas. Van Gogh left Paris for Arles to become the Hokusai of French painting. Cézanne did not have to go native—he was the real thing. And the upswelling of regionalism inflected his deviation from academic norms with an aura of delicious rusticity.

There is little doubt that setting Cézanne in his culture explains a great deal about his work. I learned many surprising and illuminating things about him from Athanassoglou-Kallmyer's scholarly investigations. I had, for example, always been puzzled by Cézanne's *Three Skulls* of 1898–1900 in the Detroit Institute of Arts. It was intoxicating to observe how the artist painted the skulls in the same way that he painted his celebrated apples, marking the planes with those wonderful and unmistakable brush strokes. But why skulls? And why three? No explanation would be needed had Cézanne painted three apples on a table. An artist might happen to have a single human skull in his studio, as a prop. But three of them?

As it turns out, the three skulls derive from an archeological display. One of Cézanne's closest Provençal friends was a world-class scientist, Antoine-Fortuné Marion, a geologist and paleontologist who discovered the remains of an entire Neolithic culture beneath the soil of Provence. For Cézanne it was irresistible to see in the skulls Marion excavated the predecessors of Provençals. Cézanne's painting of skulls was thus more than an exercise in *facture* and more than a modern *vanitas*: It was a celebration of his local world.

Before reading this study, I had always found Cézanne's bathers difficult to ex-

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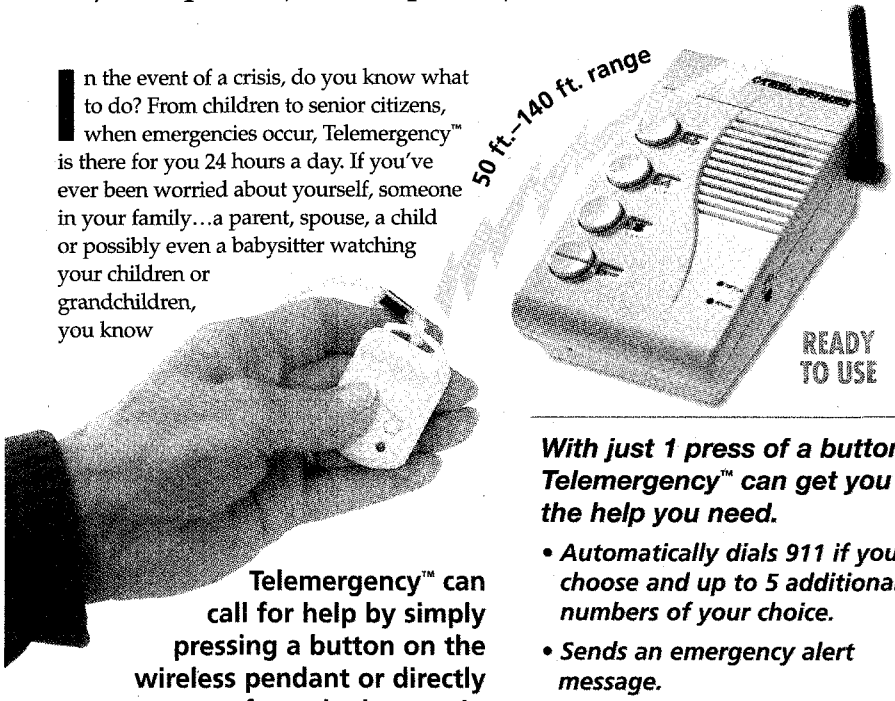

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plain. So it was truly illuminating to discover their Arcadian origins: Athanassoglou-Kallmyer argues that Cézanne was a passionate reader of Virgil from his youth, and that the bathers embody the pastoral reality underneath the encroaching industrialization of Provence, which Cézanne found revolting. As he wrote his goddaughter in 1902: "Unfortunately, what we call progress is nothing but the invasion of bipeds who do not rest until they have transformed everything into hideous quais with gas lamps—and, what is still worse—with electric illumination. What times we live in!"

The book is rich in such insights. The problem is that nearly all of them concern Cézanne's choice of motifs, rather than his manner of depiction. Nothing in Cézanne's culture explains the lip of the *compotier*, or the brush strokes, or the astonishing space, or the way forms tilt toward the viewer. The explanations that Cézanne's enthusiasts gave for his distinctive art were wrong. What can be said is this: The factors that made Cézanne a celebrity made him a figure of great interest to young painters, who visited and wrote the master, and who discovered that the reasons for his greatness had to be sought elsewhere. "I think the young painters much more intelligent than the others," he wrote his son in 1906, the year of his death. To Emile Bernard, he famously wrote, "See in nature the cylinder, the sphere, the cone." To a German collector, he said, "I try to render perspective solely by means of color." And he pointed to patches of color that were only patches of color, without as yet conveying distance.

This is not the discourse of the Provençal chauvinist. This is the discourse of the father of modern art. Color as form, reality as geometry—*hommage à Cézanne!* ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

adopted my criteria, he might have a point if Noam Chomsky and Uri Avnery were advising the Arab League to wage a "humanitarian war" to liberate Palestine, serving as high-paid consultants to Egyptian state television and vacationing in the south of France with George Habash.

ADAM SHATZ

THE POINTE IS...

New York City

■ I will not address Diane Rafferty's comments on performances in her March 3 "One Step Removed," on the New York City Ballet, the School of American Ballet (SAB) and my book on Balanchine technique, as there will always be a variety of opinion on matters of artistic taste and judgment. There are, however, some

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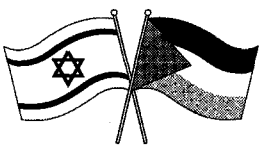

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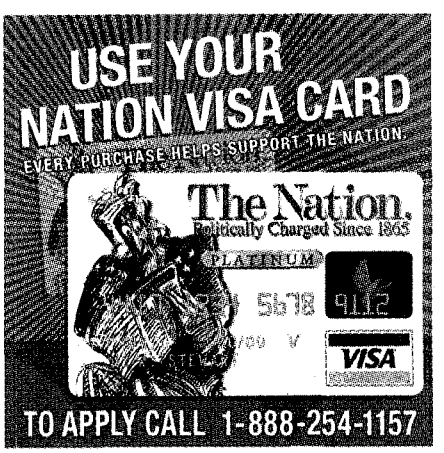

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errors of fact. Balanchine did not expect, much less require, his company dancers to take regular school classes in addition to his; he did expect us to do what we needed in order to dance well, but each dancer had to decide what that was (class, practice, swimming, Pilates, working out, etc.). I was one of the few company dancers who regularly took class at SAB; anecdotes from that experience are in my book. The Russians at SAB taught the old, pre-Vaganova Russian School; Vaganova did not emerge as an important teacher until after their time as students. I taught at SAB under Balanchine's direct supervision from the early 1960s almost until he died. In the early years I more often taught younger girls and boys, in the later years generally the most advanced girls; I also taught company class through those years. Despite the statement attributed to him in Muriel Stuart's book, he no longer wanted SAB to teach based precisely on that book and its drawings.

And there are some misunderstandings of technical details I might have cleared up had Rafferty discussed them with me. The text of my book precisely describes fifth position; apparent overcrossing in some photographs is a matter of camera angle. The technique is taught differently in some respects to very advanced dancers; the book is explicit on this. The use of the heel in jumps—taking off and landing—is the most important example. The book explains in detail that heel contact with the floor is valuable when taking off. It likewise explains that it is never good to fall down on the heel when landing. Even after reviewing specific details, she might well disagree, but it would be a disagreement with what I actually wrote and teach.

Finally, we need to understand Mr. B's use of "unalterable." Turnout, extension, pointe work, turning, jumping—they'll always be central to classical ballet. But the details of what Balanchine wanted in class from very advanced students and professional dancers steadily evolved over the years I worked for him. Rafferty cites Suzanne Farrell's unprecedented facility off-balance. One wouldn't try to incorporate that in beginning or intermediate classes, but Mr. B did in his teaching and helped me incorporate it in mine.

SUKI SCHORER

RAFFERTY REPLIES

New York City

■ There are no "errors of fact" or "misunderstandings of technical details" in my article, except one, which Suki Schorer neglects: Corps member Alina Dronova, whom I praise, studied, after leaving her home country of Ukraine, at LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts, the school that was the inspiration for the movie and television show *Fame*—a fact generously pointed out to me by Michelle Mathesius, chair of the school's dance department. Dronova went on to serve as an apprentice at City Ballet, studying at the School of American Ballet, at which Schorer is a teacher. As we went to press, I had only the information from the New York City press office that Dronova had "just arrived from Ukraine." I apologize for the misleading statement.

DIANE RAFFERTY

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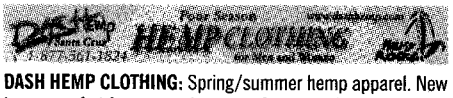

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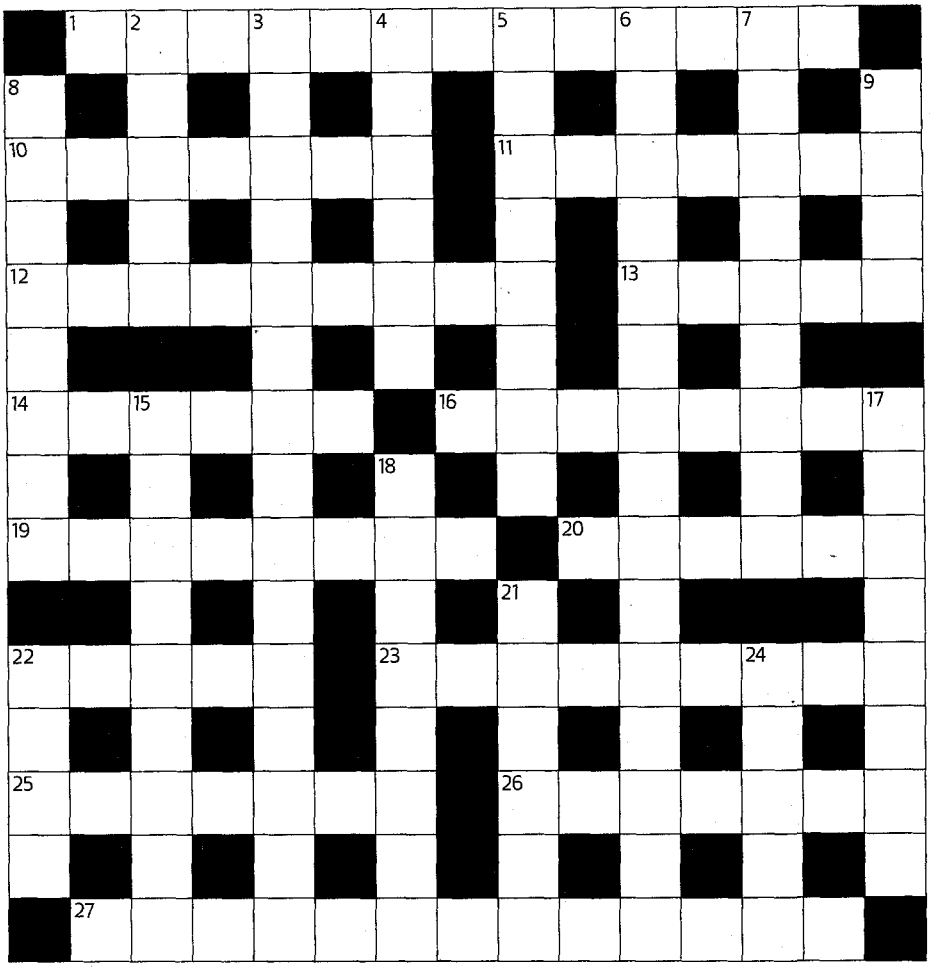

ACROSS

1 The District Attorney shed light on the place where people buy directions to stop incipient activity. (4,4,5)

10 Attention, for example, given to a butterfly that reaches a certain state. (7)

11 What the Mafia may engage in could prove essential to court procedure. (7)

12 Take cover with a lousy, lousy arrangement—in an awful way. (9)

13 What the egoist may state if he feels self-important, though angry. (5)

14 In a way, can have a purpose about it, as a matter of foreign exchange. (6)

16 Those who go about surreptitiously in so-called gym shoes. (8)

19 One might find the ale upset—upset because of what is carried on the shoulders… (8)

20 …with the same brew being given to a very quiet circle in Syria. (6)

22 Played by the necessarily wealthy friend in Paris at the heart of it. (5)

23 An unusual name for rain gauges, placed in true domes, but crudely fashioned. (9)

25 Putting something in the pot, before getting a gin sling. (7)

26 Arranged in 10, possibly. (2,5)

27 Important recent developments show order given to the bellhop, when he appears at all points. (5-4,4)

DOWN

2 and **15** It's the chemicals used in his work that result in this crazy comparison. (2,3,2,1,6)

3 It might show a fractured skull this way. (4-2,9)

4 The absence of medicine might be a little bumpy! (6)

5 What's the point to supplication when you're doing it to the kill the bugs? (8)

6 Things rarely occur this way. (4,2,1,4,4)

7 Look at the paint put on by some people! (3,6)

8 Igloo? (8)

9 A little bit of land lies in a different position this way. (4)

15 See 2 down

17 Now a few words from ours, we were often told. (8)

18 Made to hang like a high-placed fiddle. (6,2)

21 Pretending to model behavior? (6)

22 A method of escape when you get it. (4)

24 Each word of "bow window" does, to prove a source for something. (5)

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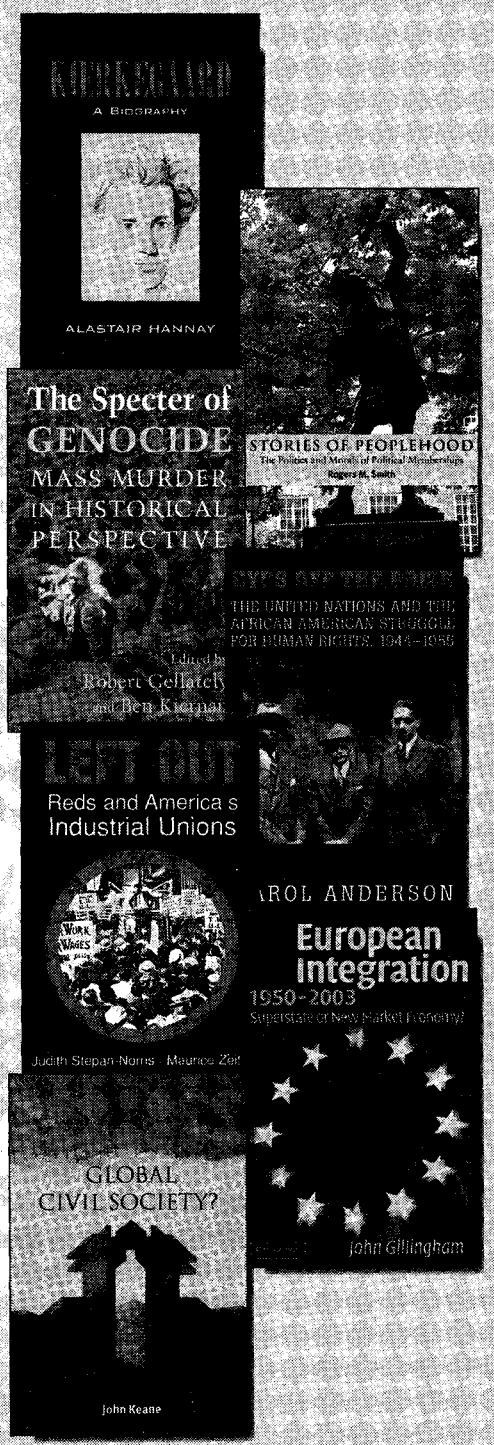

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